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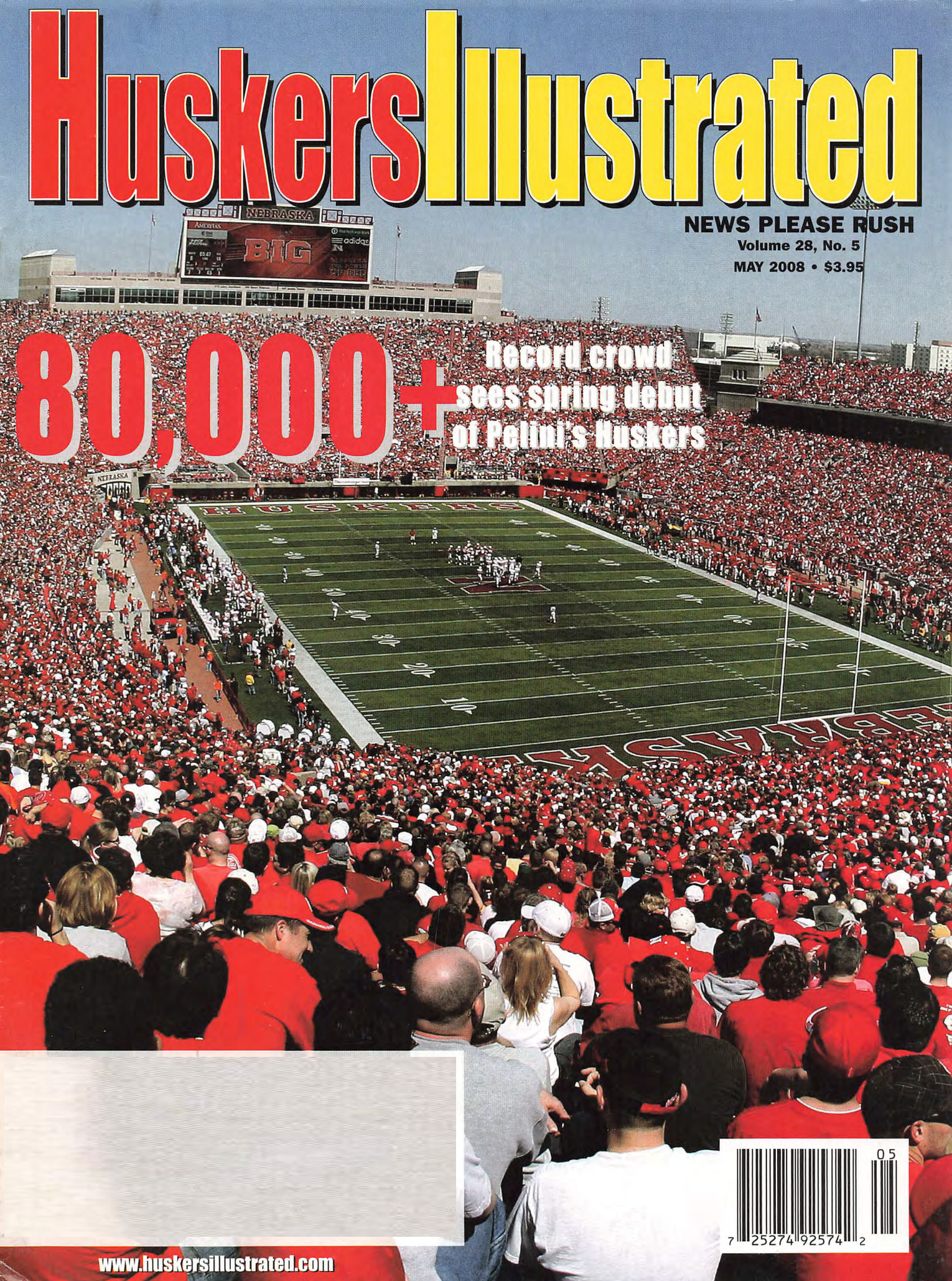
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Record crowd
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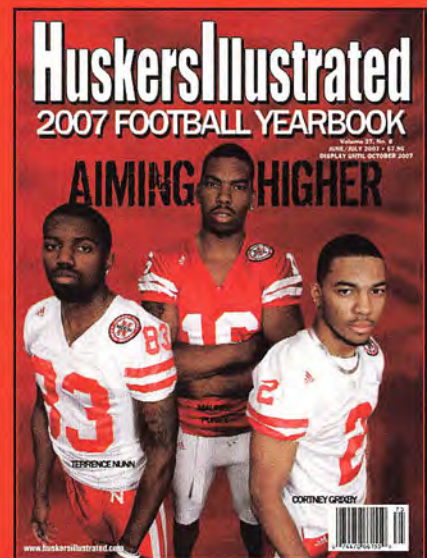
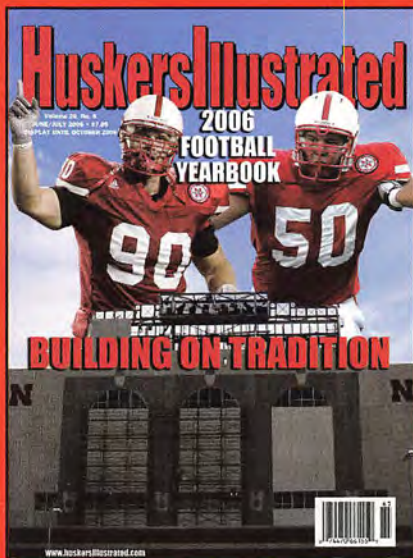
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Turning The Page

*The smoke is clearing,
and it's time to move on*



Brian Hill

MY FIRST Spring Game as editor of *Huskers Illustrated* came in 1999. Members of the media were seated outside in the west stadium, which was closed to fans as construction continued on the massive skybox structure atop that section of Memorial Stadium.

A crowd of 29,739 showed up for that spring preview of the Huskers, who were coming off a 9-4 season in Frank Solich's first year as head coach. That season came on the heels of an amazing 60-3 stretch, including three national championships in four seasons under Tom Osborne.

Fast forward to April 19, 2008. A record crowd of 80,149 is on hand to see the spring debut of Bo Pelini's first Nebraska team. Osborne is back as athletic director, and the smoke seems to be clearing and most of the wounds healing from an unprecedented time of unrest in Husker Nation, ending with a 5-7 record in 2007.

It's time to turn the page.

It's also a time of change at *Huskers Illustrated*. After nine-plus years of bringing you this magazine, I am moving on to join my wife and family 200 miles away from the city I've lived in since my college days.

As I look forward to new challenges, I leave a position that has been often stressful but extremely rewarding. Aren't they all?

I leave *Huskers Illustrated* in the very

capable hands of contributing editor Mike Babcock, who has been with the magazine almost since its inception, and whomever is selected by the good people at Landmark Community Newspapers to be my successor. *Huskers Illustrated* was the No. 1 magazine covering University of Nebraska sports when I took over and will continue to be into the future.

I'd like to thank everyone who has made my time in this position enjoyable, including the writers, photographers and artists, whose works have graced these pages during my tenure, as well as the advertising sales representatives. I can't forget the folks at our customer service office and at Omaha Print.

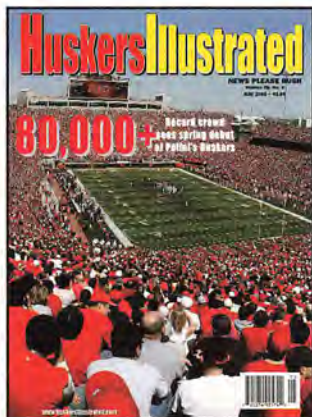
Most of all, I'd like to thank my wife for her patience and my father and late mother for helping instill the work ethic that has helped me get through some of the crazy-

ness that often accompanies deadlines in this business.

An old newspaper friend once told me that when you put out a perfect edition, it was time to quit. I certainly didn't make it there, but that was always the intent. This column was almost always the last thing produced before a particular issue was "put to bed," to use an old newspaper term. Sometimes, the late hour may have shown, but the idea was to pull everything together in that edition. Please excuse me for straying this one time.

It's been fun, but it's time for me to step away and take a different role. On Saturdays this fall, I'll relax, watch the games that are televised and do many of the things fans do.

Then, I'll go to bed at a reasonable hour, get a good night's sleep and wait for my *Huskers Illustrated* to arrive a few days later. ■



ON THE COVER

A record crowd of 80,149 was on hand for Nebraska's annual Red-White Spring Game April 19. Cover photo by Scott Bruhn.

Huskers Illustrated

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User-Friendly Offense

Having an experienced quarterback like Ganz will allow Watson to sleep better over the summer



Terry DOUGLASS

THE END OF SPRING FOOTBALL was apparently just the beginning for Nebraska offensive coordinator Shawn Watson.

With several key cogs expected to be back in place in the fall, Watson said he could hardly wait to get started, spending his summer days scheming and dreaming different ways to get the football to his biggest weapons.

"It doesn't ever stop for me," Watson said just minutes after Nebraska's Red-White Spring Game on April 19. "What's nice about spring ball was that we were able to teach our offense, conceptually, and now we'll sit back in the summer and be creative and think about how we're going to target our players and create touches for them. That's the fun part for the summer."

Fun for Watson because he said he has so many options and ways to exploit a defense.

The Cornhuskers are slated to return six full-time starters and 24 lettermen on offense from a unit that ranked No. 7 in the country last season in passing offense (323.8 yards per game), ninth in total offense (468.3) and 28th in scoring offense (33.4 points per game).

"We're going to be multiple," Watson said. "We can create touches. We can give a defense a hard time."

"Our multiplicity, I think, is what makes us different."

First-year head coach Bo Pelini said he's thrilled to have Watson calling the shots on offense.

"He's very detailed. He's a hard worker, and he's done a great job of getting the offensive staff on the same page," Pelini said. "I have a lot of confidence in him. I feel very fortunate to have him. I think he's a tremendous football coach."

Although former head coach Bill Callahan handled the majority of the play-calling duties while Watson was the offensive coordinator last season, Watson certainly isn't new to running an offense. He called plays for Colorado and head coach Gary Barnett from 2000-2005 and, while it's not something Husker fans will ever hear him bring up now, Watson was the architect of the Buffaloes' 62-36 "Black Friday" offensive explosion against NU in 2001.

While Watson has made it clear that he would prefer to shed the "West Coast offense" label previously used to describe the scheme under Callahan, many of the same elements will be in place as Watson returns for his third season as a member of the coaching staff. Watson said NU's passing game is all about creating mismatches and putting defenders into positions where they have to make split-second decisions.

"It's a user-friendly offense for the quarterback," Watson said. "Big-time."

That's where senior-to-be Joe Ganz fits in. As a fifth-year player, Ganz knows Watson's system inside and out and proved it late last season when starting quarterback Sam Keller's broken collar-

bone forced him to start the final three games.

Ganz, who appeared in a six games in all, completed 89-of-152 pass attempts (58.6 percent) for 1,435 yards and 16 touchdowns and seven interceptions. In his three starts, Ganz passed for 405 yards against Kansas, a school-record 510 yards and seven TDs against Kansas State and 484 yards against Colorado.

Hearing that Pelini planned to retain Watson — as well as the subsequent news that Watson had turned down an offer from Alabama head coach Nick Saban to be the offensive coordinator for the Crimson Tide — was obviously well-received by Ganz.

"I love Coach Watson. He's a great guy, a great coach and he's really taught me a lot about the game," Ganz said. "I was really happy that he decided to stay. It was huge for me because I don't have to start all over again."

Watson said that having an experienced quarterback like Ganz returning in the fall allows him to sleep much better at night over the summer. It also allows the Huskers to "really move forward" with their offense.

"Joey's just a cool customer," Watson said. "He's a great leader and he's really poised. He's not afraid to get after people if they need gotten after. He epitomizes what you need as a leader."

Ganz isn't the only reason Watson is excited about next season. It all starts with an offensive line that returns four players who started at least six games last year in Jacob Hickman, Mike Huff, Lydon Murtha and Matt Slauson.

"We've got a long way to go, obviously, with a lot of things, and it's a process, but I really like our offensive line," Watson said. "I think we're 10 deep, maybe more. We've got a lot of work to do, but they've got talent."

That bodes well for a stable of four running backs, led by senior Marlon Lucky, who is the top returning rusher in the Big 12 Conference (1,019 yards) and also caught a team-high 75 passes for 705 yards last year. Attempting to press Lucky for playing time will be Roy Helu Jr., Quentin Castille and Marcus Mendoza.

Even after losing talented wide receivers like Maurice Purify, Terrence Nunn and Frantz Hardy, Watson likes his returning group. Seniors-to-be Nate Swift and Todd Peterson return experience and leadership, and Watson said he has been impressed by the potential of players like Niles Paul, Will Henry, Menelik Holt, Chris Brooks and Curenski Gilleylen.

While Ganz put up crazy-good passing numbers last year, Watson said Nebraska will ideally have a more balanced approach in 2008.

"Really, honestly, to win championships, you've got to be able to rush the football," Watson said. "We're going to play to our offensive line and our running backs, but then again, we're not going to sit there and let a team defend us."

Watson's busy summer will make sure of that. ■



Shawn Watson is in his second season as offensive coordinator.

Playing 'With Freedom'

**NU senior second baseman Opitz
still has a little showmanship to his game**



**Curt
McKEEVER**

HE CAME TO NEBRASKA as the top high school baseball player out of Colorado in 2004 after leading Littleton Heritage to the state championship game.

He also had some flash to his play as a shortstop, and so Husker pitching coach Rob Childress immediately dubbed him "Caddy" — as in Cadillac.

Jake Opitz didn't really like that title, but four years later, and now entrenched at second base, he's still delivering NU a lot of ultra-smooth, high-performance rides.

And, yes, he's still got a little showmanship to his game.

"I love that in him," said Nebraska coach Mike Anderson, who remembers how relentless Childress could be when it came to ribbing Opitz before his freshman season.

Opitz had needed knee surgery the summer prior to becoming a Husker, and so in his first fall camp he was being somewhat cautious.

"But he still gave the impression of 'This is who I am,'" Anderson said of Opitz's flamboyant makeup, "so when he started getting called that, I was a little bit defensive, like, 'Hey, come on, lay off of that for a little bit.'"

Anderson knew a little more about the rookie than the rest, because Opitz's high school coach, John Quarton, was a roommate of his when the two attended Northern Colorado.

"I had talked to John and said 'We're going to have to break him from some of that cockiness. He's going to have to start being very fundamentally sound, because right now he does some things that need to improve.' But he's become more fundamental."

Not surprisingly, Opitz also has been one of Nebraska's most consistent performers and someone who's commanded a lot of respect from his teammates and coaches for helping bring about a renewed commitment in 2008.

Thirty-six games into the season, NU, picked to finish sixth in the Big 12 Conference, was 28-7-1, including a second-place 13-4-1 showing in the conference.

Opitz, a four-year starter at Heritage who also was an all-state defensive back in football, was the only Husker to start each of the first 36 contests.

At that point, he was hitting .314 and had driven in 30 runs (one off the team high). But in addition to that, he was No. 3 with 20 walks and led NU in sacrifice flies.

So much for that flashy side.

"I've never really even thought about that," Opitz said when asked about where he's taken his game since arriving at NU. "My whole thing, I love winning, and I love putting on the uniform and just going out there and playing as hard as I can. As far as my personal things, maybe I should sit down and think about that."

Oh, he does have some thoughts on that.

For instance, the 5-year-old kid who played shortstop on a team of 8-year-olds, and remained at that position until college,

has grown to love playing second base.

"I think it'd be harder going back to shortstop. I'm a second baseman now, Opitz said.

He also has a big desire to play beyond Nebraska. And the more the Huskers achieve, the more Opitz believes it will help his cause.

"Definitely," he said. "You've got guys like (Johnny) Dorn, (Aaron) Pribanic and (Thad) Weber — they bring a lot of scouts, so that helps, too."

Anderson would be absolutely tickled if one of those scouts recommended Opitz.

"The one characteristic that he has that is phenomenal is his ability to play with freedom," he said. "It can be the tightest situation, and he can look guys in the eye and say 'This is what we need to get done.' And he's very level-headed about it."

These days, at least.

"He's demanded things from other players that he never has before, and he's done it in a different way," Anderson continued. "He's always been kind of an in-your-face guy, and he's done it through great communication. But the key to it is he made a decision (where) he's motivated by the team but also by hoping to have the opportunity to move on."

"His eating habits, his work habits, his study habits, I think his caring toward teammates — he made a decision to be invested in this program, in every aspect of it. And when you put that much time and effort into doing the things that he's been trying to do, it's a lot less likely that he wants to give it up."

Anderson acknowledges that Opitz needs to continue to focus on becoming a better defensive player. His eight errors 36 games into the season were the most by any Husker.

"He's a good hitter who plays defense, instead of being a great defensive player who can hit," Anderson said. "I think that's the next avenue of growth for him. ... But it's hard to get on him about it, because he works hard at it. He's one of the first guys to take extra ground balls."

It's what one would expect from someone who considers a ball diamond the best place on Earth.

Imagine how much fun Opitz must be having with NU being back in the hunt for another Big 12 title like the one it captured in 2005, and in position to play host to a NCAA regional for the third time in his four seasons.

"I wouldn't say this team's as talented as teams in the past, but I think this team's got more heart than any," Opitz said. "I think that evens it up."

In this case, it seems right that a "Caddy" is helping lead the fleet.

"I kind of knew what we were getting into — a very talented kid who was very self-confident, who needed to, obviously, grow a little bit," Anderson said. "But there's no doubt in my mind his best growth has happened this year." ■

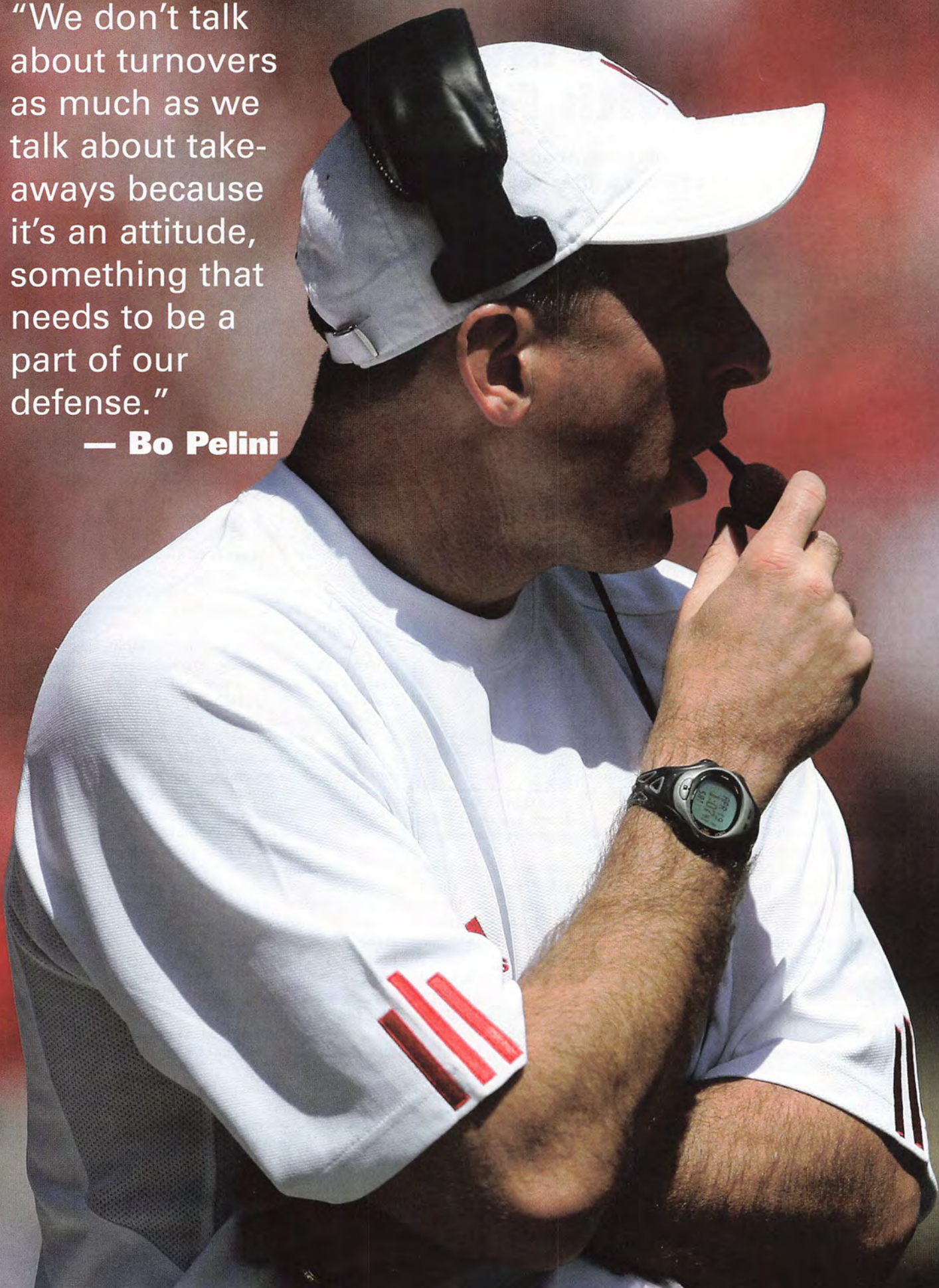


**Jake Opitz is in his
fourth season as NU's
starter at second base.**

Curt McKeever is a sportswriter for the Lincoln Journal Star. In addition to reporting on football, he is the primary beat writer for baseball. Curt can be reached at cmckeever@journalstar.com

"We don't talk about turnovers as much as we talk about take-aways because it's an attitude, something that needs to be a part of our defense."

— **Bo Pelini**



SPRING FOOTBALL

No Option

Linebacker was just doing what he was taught to do on opening play

Ah yes, the best-laid plans often go awry. Or one guy simply messes them up because, well, he's just doing what he was taught to do, playing his technique.

That's how Nebraska's Red-White intrasquad game began, with a bit of a glitch in the form of a fumble forced and recovered by Red team linebacker Tyler Wortman.

The thing is Wortman knew what was coming. "I was just supposed to play the quarterback," the senior walk-on from Grand Island, Neb. said afterward. "I got up there and I guess he didn't pitch it soon enough, so I swatted at the ball, got a piece of it.

"I don't know how happy the coaches are with me about it, though."

Wortman apologized to linebackers coach Mike Ekeler, as well as to quarterback Patrick Witt, whose deflected pitch had been intended for I-back Roy Helu Jr.

A back-story is necessary here to understand why a linebacker would be apologizing for making the sort of play coach Bo Pelini had stressed from his defense all spring.

He and his defensive staff tried to create "an attitude that we're not on the field to get off the field in three-and-out," Pelini said. "We're on the field to create turnovers.

"We don't talk about turnovers as much as we talk about takeaways because it's an attitude, something that needs to be a part of our

Stories By Mike Babcock
Photos By Scott Bruhn



Tyler Wortman

defense."

When he was defensive coordinator in 2003, the Cornhuskers ranked second in the nation in takeaways, with a school record-tying 47, including a nation-best 32 interceptions.

So here's what happened to start the Red-White game . . .

Near the end of practice on the Thursday before the game, offensive coordinator Shawn Watson put in an option play, as a tribute to former coach, now athletic director, Tom Osborne, "an old-school option play to get the fans all pumped up," said Wortman.

Much of the team had left the practice field in the Hawks Championship Center when the offense went over the elements of the play. Reporters had been allowed into the field area, as was typical post-practice procedure, but then were shuffled back out into the facility's lobby.

Watson told reporters something "fun" was planned. Quarterback Joe Ganz confirmed it but wouldn't say what. "We can't disclose that at this moment," he said. "You guys will see it on Saturday. We don't want to ruin the surprise . . . I don't want to ruin it."

As it turned out, Wortman did, not intentionally but rather instinctively.

"I kind of messed it up, I guess," he said.

That hardly dampened the enthusiasm of the fans, 80,149 of them packed into Memorial Stadium on a bright, warm afternoon to watch a scrimmage, with coaches on the field, green no-contact jerseys on the quarterbacks and a running clock in the second half.

Pelini, dressed in short pants, stood behind the offense throughout, a headset connecting him to coaches, a dramatic departure from how head coaches have done it in the past.

"There are a number of reasons for it that I don't really want to get into right now, why we were out on the



Senior quarterback Joe Ganz (12, above) completed 4-of-9 passes for 131 yards and two touchdowns, including a 77-yard strike to redshirt freshman Curenski Gilleylen (11, right). All of the quarterbacks wore green jerseys, meaning they were off limits to contact.

field," he said. "But it gives us . . . you hear the communication. You want to see the communication happening; you want to see them talking."

Being on the field also allowed for teaching. And that was the spring theme.

During a pre-spring news conference in late March, Pelini said the goal was to set a foundation, to lay bricks. "You can make the mistake of trying to be the Patriots tomorrow," he said. "It's about teaching. It's about developing and getting the players to know us and us to know them and what their strengths are and then build the system accordingly."

The biggest concern, of course, was the defense, which struggled mightily last season. And a first step to rebuilding it was regaining confidence, a swagger lost to such a degree that all black practice jerseys were pulled following the Oklahoma State game.

Nebraska finished the season without any Blackshirts, something that had never been the case since the tradition was established the second week of the 1964 season.

As the spring progressed, Pelini saw the confidence returning, although "I don't think it's something you really work on. There are certain ways you can address that without actually, specifically, addressing it," he said. "Really, the confidence comes as they start having an understanding of what to do and how to do it, and then

they see it work.

"It's fun to watch. It's very similar to the first time I was here. They're swimming in it at first. They hear a lot of new things for the first time and then they start seeing it work and they kind of see not only what they have to do but what the guys around them have to do and how it all fits. And slowly but surely you watch the confidence grow. I've seen that happen."

He went into the spring without preconceptions. He didn't watch much video on players in advance because "it's kind of irrelevant," he said. "I don't understand what they've been taught and the schemes they were playing, what was being said in their meeting rooms.

"You can get a skewed view of what a guy is or what he isn't, good and bad, until you start working with them, have a chance to coach them and see where they are."

Everyone had an opportunity, and Wortman was among those who seized the opportunity, emerging as the No. 1 BUCK linebacker and a back-up in the middle.

Wortman didn't play a down as a redshirted freshman or sophomore and didn't play much last season until injuries depleted the linebacking corps.

He had a "very good spring," Pelini said. "We're real excited about him."

Never mind that he messed up the opening option play.



DIFFERENCE-MAKER

For the record, the Red team won the Spring Game, 24-14. Asked what the Red team was able to do that the White team wasn't, wide receiver Todd Peterson said: "They got the ball on the 4-yard line for the first play of the game. Other than that, they just executed."

Actually, Wortman recovered the fumbled pitch at the 7-yard line to set up the first touchdown. Three Marlon Lucky carries got the ball in the end zone.

Peterson and defensive end Barry Turner were White team captains. Ganz and middle linebacker Phillip Dillard were Red team captains. The captains were responsible for drafting the teams, with input from the coaches, on the Wednesday before the game.

Secondary coach Marvin Sanders filled in for Turner, who left practice early that day.

"Me and Phil (Dillard) were general managers, man," Ganz said. "We were just trying to sign people on our team, and if they don't win, they're cut."

Actually, the idea was to balance the teams for a competitive game. So top-unit players were divided up. For example, the Reds had two first-team offensive linemen, Lydon Murtha and Matt Slauson, while the Whites had three, Jacob Hickman, Mike Huff and Jaivorio Burkes.

Having Ganz also was an advantage for the Red team.

"We had two guys (at quarterback) that really played well, I thought, in Zac (Lee) and Patrick (Witt)," said Peterson. But "it's kind of invaluable to have Joe because he just knows what he's doing so well."

Lee and Witt emerged from the spring as the top backups to Ganz. Witt was "probably a little bit ahead of Zac Lee," Pelini said. "But Zac Lee does a lot of good things."

"I don't put as much stock into today as I do (from) what I've seen in practice for the last 14 practices. And what I've seen is both of them getting better, developing."

REDSHIRT EMERGENCE

The Reds' second touchdown, also in the first quarter, came on a 77-yard pass from Ganz to freshman wide receiver Curenski Gilleylen, who was redshirted in the fall.

Given a choice, Gilleylen would have played. "Actually, I didn't know until I got here that I was going to redshirt," he said. "I wanted to contribute once I first got here."

Early on, practicing on the scout team, knowing he wasn't going to play was "really discouraging. I doubted myself," Gilleylen said. "I didn't think I was good enough. I questioned if I belonged here because I was always used to being the man on top. I had always been confident, and

that was something that kind of got taken away from me."

He took a step back, however, and saw a "bigger plan," he said.

In retrospect, he's glad he redshirted. "As the season progressed, I started to appreciate being on the scout team and being able to go against the 1's. It helped me a lot."

Gilleylen was slowed briefly in the spring by a hamstring but came back and "really looked good out there today," Pelini said after the game. "He's an explosive athlete."

Ganz echoed that. The 6-foot, 212-pound Gilleylen has "a linebacker's body, and he's one of the fastest guys on the team. As soon as he starts learning how to run routes to get open instead of using his pure speed and athleticism, he's going to be a real weapon," Ganz said.

"It's nice to have somebody that can stretch the field vertically."

BLACKSHIRTS BACK

There weren't Blackshirts for the final five games last season. But there will be in the fall. "We're going to stick with the tradition," defensive coordinator Carl Pelini said midway through spring practice. "We haven't talked about it as a staff exactly when, but at the appropriate time, we will return to the Blackshirt tradition. We've talked to our kids a lot about what it means and what comes along with being a Blackshirt. When we talk about getting back to the tradition and embracing the history of this program, we're not just paying it lip service.

"We mean it. And Blackshirts are part of that."

He seemed satisfied with the progress of the defense in the spring. "Guys are getting more comfortable with what we're talking about, with just the basic fundamentals, the techniques," he said before the Red-White game. "Everything's moving in a good direction.

"You don't want to base success or failure on a spring game like that because the units aren't together. They're mix and match, different guys playing with different guys. So when you evaluate, you're looking at some of the simple things, the basics."

Pelini was asked how "vanilla" the defense would be.

"We'll challenge our guys a little



Sophomore I-back Roy Helu Jr. was the game's leading rusher with 16 carries for 69 yards and one touchdown.

bit," he said. "Obviously, we don't want to show everything, and won't show everything. But we'll challenge them. We're going to try to put them in some difficult situations and try and ask them to play their techniques. We're not gong to 'vanilla' it and dummy it down so much that we're not getting any work done."

The defense recovered three-of-six fumbles, intercepted a pass and sacked the quarterbacks seven times, with different players accounting for each of the sacks.

LINEBACKERS

With last season's top four departed, linebacker was a position of interest during the spring. Dillard is the most experienced of the group. Wortman emerged in competition with Blake Lawrence, one of 11 who played as true freshman in the fall, at BUCK linebacker. And Cody Glenn finished No. 1 at WILL linebacker, after moving from running back.

Carl Pelini was hesitant to make a

definitive statement about the linebackers, however, "because we're moving guys around," he said. "We're trying to get them in positions."

Latravis Washington and Colton Koehler are among the other linebackers.

"We've got a lot of guys. They understand multiple roles," Carl Pelini said. "It is a demanding, intellectual position in this scheme. You have to understand what's going on in front of you. You have to understand what's going on behind you.

"There is constant communication involved. And the more they're in it, the more comfortable they are, and the more that communication is happening. You can really judge the success or failure of that unit as they start to hear communication. You know they're beginning to understand. We're starting to hear that communication prior to the snap."

To that end, Carl, like brother Bo, was on the field at times during the Red-White game. ■

'Pleasant Surprise'

Glenn makes fast progress after move to linebacker

During his pre-spring news conference, coach Bo Pelini said there would be position changes but that no one would be forced to play somewhere else.

If a player's heart isn't in switching positions, "it's not good for anybody on the team," Pelini said. "If we feel that somebody it's in their best interests and the team's best interest, we might present it to them. But at the end of the day, it has to be their decision."

With that provision, "we have some things in mind," he said.

What Pelini didn't have in mind was Cody Glenn's moving from running back to linebacker. But a couple of days into the spring, Glenn asked if he could make the switch.

Glenn said he had first considered such a move after Pelini was hired. Initially, he joked about it with Pelini. But he was serious when he suggested it following the third practice. If it didn't work out, Glenn told Pelini, he could always return to running back.

Soon after the move, Pelini was asked if it was going to be permanent. Nothing's permanent, Pelini replied. As it turned out, however, Glenn's position switch would be.

Linebacker certainly offered opportunity, though Glenn was an unlikely candidate. He didn't play linebacker in high school, mostly safety. And he was recruited for offense.

Because he will be a senior, "it's not something you want to make a long-term project. He shows it's a fit or not a fit," Pelini said after his second practice at linebacker. "So far, he's done a lot of good things. He's



Former I-back Cody Glenn (34) was credited with three tackles, including one sack, as a linebacker in the Spring Game.

made some plays, but it's too early to make a rash judgment. I caution myself on doing that. But I do like some of the things I've seen out of him.

"His instincts, his athleticism is showing up. He's tough. He can be a very good player. He was a heck of a running back, and he's showing the same thing on the defensive side of the ball. It's been a pleasant surprise how quickly he's made an adjustment."

Glenn settled in at WILL linebacker, competing with Latravis Washington, a high school quarterback who came to Nebraska expecting to play safety and was immediately moved to linebacker. Converted running back, converted quarterback, "we just bonded like it was nothing," said Washington, who played primarily on special teams as a true freshman.

"Cody, that's my boy. We communicate a lot. I always correct him on his mistakes. And he always corrects me on my mistakes. It's nice having him over on defense."

Though no depth chart was posted during the spring, it was clear that Glenn had climbed to the top. "We've thrown a lot at him in a short period of time," Pelini said after the Red-White game. "I think he's going to be a heck of a player for us at WILL linebacker."

During his pre-spring news conference, Pelini had talked about Glenn's being healthy and ready to contribute. "He's the kind of guy that will do anything to help the football team," said Pelini. "He's really a team guy, has a great attitude . . .

"I think he's going to be a good football player for us."

Pelini didn't know then it would be at linebacker. ■

GAME STATS

SCORING

April 19, 2008
Memorial Stadium Lincoln, Neb.
Attendance 80,149

	1	2	3	4	F
Nebraska White	0	7	0	7	14
Nebraska Red	14	10	0	0	24

First Quarter

	W	R
R Lucky 1-yard Run (Henery Kick) 13:20 Drive: 3 plays 7 yds 1:20	0	7

R Gilleylen Pass from Ganz 77-yards (Henery Kick) 09:06 Drive: 4 plays 87 yds 4:14	0	14
--	---	----

Second Quarter

R Mendoza Pass from Ganz 24-yards (Henery Kick) 11:54 Drive: 3 plays 26 yds 0:59	0	21
--	---	----

W Helu Jr. 3-yard Run (Kunalic Kick) 06:51 Drive: 10 plays 75 yds 5:03	7	21
--	---	----

R Henery 35-yard Field Goal 02:02 Drive: 10 plays 62 yds 4:49	7	24
--	---	----

Fourth Quarter

W Jones Pass from Lee 10-yards (Kunalic kick) 11:18 Drive: 15 plays 73 yds 10:22	14	24
--	----	----

TEAM STATS

	W	R
Total First Downs	15	12
Rushing	8	3
Passing	7	9
Penalty	0	0
Rushing Attempts	34	32
Yards Gained Rushing	154	99
Yards Lost Rushing	51	31
Net Yards Rushing	103	68
Net Yards Passing	156	243
Passes Attempted	26	23
Passes Completed	14	11
Had Intercepted	1	0
Percent Completion	53.8%	47.8%
Yards per Attempt	6.0	10.6
Yards per Completion	11.1	22.1
Total Offensive Plays	60	55
Total Net Yards	259	311
Avg. Gain Per Play	4.3	5.7
Fumbles: No-Lost	4-2	2-1
Penalties: No-Yards	1-5	3-20
Punts: No-Yards	5-238	5-229
Avg. Per Punt	47.6	45.8
Avg. Net Punt	47.6	45.8
Punt Returns: No-Yards	0-0	0-0
Kickoff Returns: No-Yards	1-9	0-0
Interception Returns: No-Yards	0-0	1-0
Fumble Returns: No-Yards	0-0	0-0
Miscellaneous Yards	0	0
Possession Time	30:22	29:38
Third-Down Conversions	7-14	7-14
Percentage	50.0%	50.0%
Fourth-Down Conversions	0-0	0-0
Percentage	0.0%	0.0%
Sacks By: No-Yards	4-22	3-19

INJURED, DID NOT PLAY

Players missing the Spring Game because of injuries included: Anthony Blue, CB; Tyson Hetzer, TE; Ndamukong Suh, DT; Kenny Wilson, I-back.



NU athletic director Tom Osborne shares a laugh with Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who was in Lincoln for the Spring Game.

INDIVIDUAL STATS

WHITE

	No	Gain	Lost	Net	Avg	TD	Lg
Helu Jr.	16	69	0	69	4.3	1	13
Castille	5	41	2	39	7.8	0	17
Lee	6	26	11	15	2.5	0	22
Ebke	1	10	0	10	10.0	0	10
Jones	3	8	5	3	1.0	0	5
Brooks	1	9	12	-12	-12.0	0	0
Witt	2	0	21	-21	-10.5	0	0
Total	34	154	51	103	3.0	1	22

	Att	Comp	%	Int	Yds	TD	Lg
Witt	12	6	50.0	1	61	0	17
Lee	11	6	54.5	0	87	1	38
Ebke	3	2	66.7	0	8	0	8
Total	26	14	53.8	1	156	0	38

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Peterson	3	23	0	11
Castille	2	55	0	38
Helu Jr.	2	25	0	17
Jones	2	21	1	11
Brooks	2	21	0	12
Hill	1	8	0	8
Paul	1	3	0	3
Lester	1	0	0	0
Total	14	156	1	38

KICKOFF RETURNS

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
O'Hanlon	1	9	0	9
Total	1	9	0	9

PUNTING

	No	Avg	Lg	Blk	TB	FC	50+	In 20
Titchener	4	44.0	53	0	0	3	1	1
Wesch	1	62.0	62	0	0	1	1	1
Total	5	47.6	62	0	0	4	2	2

FIELD GOALS

	Made	Att	Lg	Blkd
Kunalic	0	1	0	0
Total	0	1	0	0

DEFENSE

	Solo	Asst	Tot	TFL	Sack	PD	FF	FR
Koehler	3	3	6	5.0	0-0	0	0	0
Turner	3	1	4	1-5	1-5	0	0	0
Covey	1	3	4	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
O'Hanlon	2	1	3	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Glenn	2	1	3	1-4	1-4	0	0	0
May	1	2	3	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Sievers	1	2	3	1-6	1-6	0	0	0
Asante	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
TEAM	2	0	2	1-7	1-7	0	0	0
Ford	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Sullivan	1	1	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Harvey	1	1	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	1-0
Hagg	1	1	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Lawrence	1	1	2	1-1	0-0	0	0	0
Hays	0	2	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Barfield	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Cassidy	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Yancy	0	1	1	5-1	0-0	0	0	0
Escamilla	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Crick	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0

RED

	No	Gain	Lost	Net	Avg	TD	Lg
Lucky	13	38	1	37	2.8	1	7
Mendoza	7	37	4	33	4.7	0	15
Castille	4	9	1	8	2.0	0	4
Davis	2	5	4	1	0.5	0	5
Lawson	1	0	0	0	0.0	0	0
Spano	1	0	3	-3	-3.0	0	0
Ganz	4	10	18	-8	-2.0	0	10
Total	32	99	31	68	2.1	1	15

	Att	Comp	%	Int	Yds	TD	Lg
Ganz	9	4	44.4	0	131	2	77
Spano	6	4	66.7	0	47	0	15
Davis	5	1	20.0	0	48	0	48
Witt	3	2	66.7	0	17	0	17
Total	23	11	47.8	0	243	2	77

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Holt	3	31	0	15
Gilleylen	2	89	1	77
Mendoza	2	39	1	24
Swift	2	25	0	20
Donahue	1	48	0	48
Martin	1	11	0	11
Total	11	243	2	77

	No	Avg	Lg	Blk	TB	FC	50+	In 20
Titchener	4	46.2	54	0	0	3	1	3
Wesch	1	44.0	44	0	0	1	0	0
Total	5	45.8	54	0	0	4	1	3

	Made	Att	Lg	Blkd
Henery	1	1	35	0
Total	1	1	35	0

	Solo	Asst	Tot	TFL	Sack	PD	FF	FR
Amukamara	6	2	8	0-0	0-0	0	1	0
Murillo	5	3	8	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Wortman	6	0	6	1-13	0-0	0	1	1-0
Moore	1	4	5	1-8	1-8	0	0	0
Thenarse	3	0	3	1-5	0-0	0	0	0
Culbert	3	0	3	0-0	0-0	0	0	1-0
Santin	1	2	3	1-3	1-3	0	0	0
Allen	1	2	3	1-8	1-8	1	0	0
Washington	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Grove	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Potter	2	0	2	0-0	0-0	1	0	0
Dixon	1	1	2	1-2	0-0	0	0	0
Fahie	0	2	2	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Thorell	1	0	1	0-0	0-0	2	0	0
Camarata	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Lingenfelter	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Sayre	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0
Klingelhoefer	0	1	1	0-0	0-0	0	0	0

INTERCEPTION RETURNS

	No	Yds	TD	Lg
Murillo	1	0	0	0
Total	1	0	0	0

SPRING FOOTBALL NOTES

PLENTY OF I-BACKS

Despite Cody Glenn's move to linebacker, there is depth at I-back with the emergence of Roy Helu Jr. during his first spring at Nebraska. Helu finished it off by rushing for 69 yards and a touchdown on 16 carries in the Red-White game.

During a scrimmage the previous Saturday, Helu broke a 57-yard touchdown run. Asked about the run afterward, coach Bo Pelini said: "I'm seeing what I've seen the whole spring. I'm seeing a guy who's explosive. We had a couple of guys who were misfit in the run, and he took advantage. He got down in the secondary and made a couple of guys miss."

"He's a heck of a football player. And I've seen it since day one of spring."

Helu played in seven games as a true freshman, carrying 45 times for 209 yards. He's 10 pounds heavier, at 216, and more comfortable in the system.

"Have I learned it fast? Marlon (Lucky) and Cody told me and 'Q' that we learned pretty fast, but I don't know how we compared to other backs in the nation," Helu said.

"Q" is Quentin Castille, who also will be a sophomore. Plus, Marcus Mendoza, who teamed with Ganz on a 24-yard touchdown pass in the Spring Game, is coming off a redshirt.

PRAISE FOR BURKES

Jaivorio Burkes, another of the freshmen who played last season, established himself as the leading candidate to start at offensive right tackle in the fall.

"He has all the tools," said Matt Slauson, who played right guard in the spring. "He has the longest arms I've ever seen, and his power in his legs, as soon as he locks onto a guy and extends his arms, they're going down every time. He has amazing power."

"He's a lot more physically developed than most 18-year-old guys. He can grab a guy and just toss him down, grab a guy the way Carl Nicks did but with a lot more aggression."

The 6-foot-5, 325-pound Burkes was pulled from a redshirt last season after Lydon Murtha was injured and started three games, his first against Texas at Austin.



Jaivorio Burkes

LEAN AND MEAN

Middle linebacker Phillip Dillard dropped 30 pounds during the off-season. He was listed at 250 as a sophomore but weighed nearly 270 when he returned to campus in January, following the university's semester break. He played at 238 in the spring.

"It gets on you fast but comes off slow," he said. "It took a lot of hard work, a lot of extra workouts, after-workout workouts, making sure I eat right, not eat late."

He was a late-night eater, he said, but now he no longer eats after 7:30 p.m.

"I feel so much better. I don't have to worry about weight or being tired," said Dillard. "Man, that's a lot of weight. It was all for the better. They (coaches) were right. I had to do it. I'm not just losing weight for myself, I'm losing weight for my teammates."

"If I'm tired and can't think, I can't play."

The middle linebacker has to make check calls.



Phillip Dillard

WATCHING

Defensive tackle Ndamukong Suh also dropped weight during the off-season, and not just following knee surgery that kept him on the sideline during the spring. "That was always my goal before the surgery," said Suh, who weighed "about 285, 290."

Missing the spring, particularly with new coaches and a new system, was frustrating. But he was always close to defensive coordinator and line coach Carl Pelini during practice, with a script of plays in-hand, "almost like a little mini-coach," Suh said. "In the sense of learning the defense, I don't think I lost anything in that way" because he was able to get "mental reps."

VETERAN BUNCH

The line is the most experienced aspect of the defense, with all four starters returning and six seniors among the top eight. Back-up end Pierre Allen will be a sophomore.

"I'm excited about the progress of the defensive line," said Carl Pelini. "I think they're really taking to the new techniques. They're asking good questions. The want-to is there, which is the biggest thing. When you talk about defensive line play, you talk about process."

"It is a process because it's so reactionary. You can't think and play defensive line. Repetition is the key, so we're not nearly where we want to be come opening game next year."

OTHERS SIDELINED

In addition to Suh, cornerback Anthony Blue, running back Kenny Wilson and tight end Tyson Hetzer were among others who missed all or part of the spring. Wilson was on the field the first day but spent the remainder of the spring in sweats, unable to participate while he continued to heal from a broken leg suffered the previous spring. He expects to be back in the fall.

Blue and Hetzer will be back. And no one was seriously injured in the Red-White game.

REMEMBER THE FULLBACK

Thomas Lawson was excited early in the spring. "We put in a lot more running plays for the fullback, and we've been running the ball out there," he said. "I haven't had a handoff, a fullback handoff, since high school. So it's kind of new, and I'm excited for that."

Lawson and Andy Sand were the fullbacks last season. They had five starts between them, and no carries. The offense had only one running play for the fullback, and it was never called. In fact, during Bill Callahan's tenure as coach, the fullback carried only four times.

Actually, the fullback carried only three times, all Steve Kriewald in 2004. Dane Todd was credited — or rather charged — with a carry on a fake punt in the 2007 Cotton Bowl.

Auburn wasn't fooled. The play lost 15 yards.

OK, so there aren't THAT many more running plays for the fullback, "a couple of more," said Lawson. "I mean, we're not going to be running them all the time."



Thomas Lawson

ALIVE AND KICKING

Except for questions about who would be handling punt and kickoff returns, and they haven't been identified yet, there wasn't much talk about the kicking game during the spring. That's understandable considering punter Dan Titchener and place-kickers Alex Henery and Adi Kunalic return — as do long-snapper T.J. O'Leary and holder Jake Wesch, who has handled kickoffs during his career and punted twice during the Red-White game.

Wesch had a 62-yard punt, in fact. Titchener punted four times each for the Red and White teams, averaging 45 yards with a long of 54.

Henery and Kunalic kicked extra-points, two each. Henery kicked a 35-yard field goal for the Red team. And Kunalic handled kickoffs for both teams.

Henery kicked a 65-yard field goal inside the Hawks Championship Center prior to practice on the Thursday before the Red-White game.

BIG PLAYS

Henery's field goal in the Spring Game was set up by a 48-yard pass from quarterback Beau Davis to Matt Donahue, a walk-on from Fremont, Neb., by way of Ohio. The 6-foot-2, 175-pound wide receiver will have to sit out this season under NCAA transfer rules.

Quarterback Zac Lee was involved in the two longest plays by the White team, a 38-yard pass to I-back Quentin Castille and a 22-yard run on the final touchdown drive. ■

Impressive

Recruits enjoy NU Spring Game atmosphere By Rick Shaw

The Bo Pelini coaching era at Nebraska kicked off in with a bang on April 19 as more than 80,000 fans filled the Memorial Stadium seats to watch the Husker Spring Game. Among those in attendance were more than 100 recruits, including several members of the 2008 signing class.

A few 2009 prospects holding Husker scholarship offers also roamed the sidelines in hopes of getting a better feel for what game days in Lincoln are all about. What they saw impressed them.

Ryan Mossakowski, a highly touted quarterback out of Centennial High School in Frisco, Texas, had attended scrimmages at both Auburn and Oklahoma earlier this spring. The 6-foot-4, 200-pound signal caller admitted, however, that neither experience compared to the atmosphere he witnessed in Lincoln.

"When I went to Auburn's spring game, and they had 35,000 people there, I thought that was a lot,"



Quarterback Ryan Mossakowski (left) of Frisco, Texas, and cornerback Gabe Lynn of Tulsa, Okla., were two of the visitors in Lincoln for Nebraska's Spring Game.

Mossakowski said. "It didn't compare with what I saw at Nebraska.

"The players at Nebraska were real positive and seemed like they were all excited to be there. All of the coaches were phenomenal, too. To see that combined with the sellout atmosphere — it was special."

Rated a four-star prospect by Rivals.com, Mossakowski has picked up early scholarship offers from some of the nation's finest programs, including Alabama, Arizona, Auburn, Clemson, Kansas, Nebraska, Oregon and Texas A&M. A starter since his freshman season at Frisco, he earned

all-state honors in 2007 after completing 57 percent of his passes for 2,963 yards and 19 touchdowns.

"Right now, my plan is to take as many visits as I can and then narrow it down," Mossakowski said. "I don't have a timeframe on a decision, but I'd like it to be sooner rather than later. Once all my criteria are met with a school, that's the day I'll probably commit."

"From what I saw this past weekend in Lincoln, I'd expect Nebraska to be right up there until the end."

Another highly touted prospect, Gabe Lynn of Jenks, Okla., was also in

NEBRASKA COMMITMENTS FOR 2009

Player	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	40	Hometown (School)
Cole Pensick	DT	6-2	250	4.97	Lincoln, Neb. (Northeast)

For more daily recruiting information, visit HuskersIllustrated.com, a member of the Rivals.com network.

attendance. Rated the No. 25 prospect in the country (four-stars) by Rivals, the 6-1, 180-pound cornerback gave positive reports about his time at Nebraska.

"The thing that stood out the most to me is the fact that they (Nebraska) sold out the Spring Game," Lynn said. "You don't see that kind of atmosphere anywhere else in college football.

"I also enjoyed getting to know the coaches better. Cornerbacks coach (Marvin) Sanders is a real nice guy and seems to know a lot about football. He's a guy that seems like he cares more about the player as a person — like a guy that's going to take care of you and make sure you're making the right decisions. All of the coaches were great though."

Lynn, the younger brother of current Husker linebacker Phil Dillard, holds scholarship offers from more than 20 Division I schools, including Miami, Michigan, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oklahoma State, Tennessee and Texas A&M. He earned second-team all-state honors as a junior after tallying 52 tackles and five interceptions as a defensive back. He also used his 4.47-second speed in the 40-yard dash to return three kicks and two punts for scores during the 2007 campaign.

The blue-chipper from Oklahoma claims no leaders at this stage of the recruiting process but said he hopes to have a decision locked down before the start of his senior season.

"I'm still open," Lynn said. "I wouldn't say I have any favorites yet. I'd like to see as many of these schools that I can and have a decision made by late summer, if possible.

"The fact that Phil is there is a definite plus for Nebraska. It would be real cool to play with him. That won't be a deciding factor though. If I go to Nebraska, it won't be because of Phil. It will be because it's the best school for me."

Rex Burkhead, another athlete claiming double-digit scholarship offers, said his visit to Nebraska really opened his eyes to the tradition and pageantry of Husker football. In fact, the 5-11, 190-pound running back prospect out of Plano, Texas, said he hopes to make it back to Lincoln for another visit over the course of the next few months.

RECRUITING NOTES

Some Visit Several Times

By Sean Stevens

Nebraska's annual Red-White Spring Game was held in conjunction with Junior Day, a day when many top prospects get their first up-close look at the program. However, for some of those prospects who live closer to Lincoln, the April 19 affair was not their first time in Lincoln.

Dual-threat quarterback Nathan Scheelhaase (6-foot-3, 185 pounds) of Kansas City, Mo., made his third unofficial visit to campus, having participated in NU's summer camp in 2007 and sitting in the stands when USC visited last September.

Scheelhaase has become friendly with Nebraska's incoming freshman linebacker Will Compton.

"Yeah, I was with him like the whole time," Scheelhaase said. "We stood out on the field talking. He's someone I look up to. I talked to him when he went through things with the whole recruiting process. He told me he stayed with Blake Lawrence last night, and Blake is one of my friends, too."

The trip made a good impression, but the first junior to win the Kansas City area's prestigious Simone Award said that he is not hurrying to make a decision.

"I still say all my offered schools are in it," Scheelhaase said. "I want to see who I feel comfortable with. I'll probably try to get up to a few camps this summer, too. Then, I'll make a short list after I talk with the coaches a little more. Nebraska is definitely still in the mix for sure."

The Spring Game is also a chance for NU to show the in-state prospects what it has to offer. New head coach Bo Pelini's staff has renewed emphasis on Nebraska high schools, and there were many 2009 recruits in attendance.

● Offensive lineman Jon Lechner (6-5, 310) of Omaha Creighton Prep was among the in-state visitors.

"It was a great atmosphere and very energetic," Lechner said. "I thought the team looked really good. Joey Ganz played real well, and Quentin Castille runs with so much power. I was really impressed."

● Tyrone Sellers (6-3, 215) of McCook was also in the seats. Sellers has received scholarship offers from Iowa, Kansas and Kansas State but has yet to receive a Husker offer.

"It was nice to see Husker Nation behind new head coach Pelini," said the tight end prospect. "You could see that everyone is excited about the change. They said at the stadium that it was a record Spring Game attendance, so that was pretty cool."

● Millard South wide receiver Vondrae Tostenson (6-4, 215) was also at the game. Tostenson missed most of his junior season because of injury but has still received an offer from Iowa and strong interest from around the nation — including Nebraska. He talked recently about the Huskers and Hawkeyes.

"It's still pretty equal between those two," Tostenson said. "Nebraska is where I've always wanted to go, but Iowa is also close to home, and they offered me first, so it's pretty equal right now. I'm just going to keep rehabbing and get myself ready to play this fall." ■



Nathan Scheelhaase

"Oh, it was awesome," Burkhead replied when asked how the visit went overall. "Man, they had 80,000 people at the Spring Game, so you can't ask for much more than that. All of the facilities were pretty amazing, especially the weight room. I haven't seen anything like that before, really."

"Right now, I'm just trying to get to all of the colleges interested in me, and once I get done with that, I'll start to plan another visit up to Nebraska."

Burkhead rushed 304 times for 1,768 yards and 29 touchdowns as a junior running back. He also added 523 yards and three more scores on 47 receptions. He's accumulated more than 20 scholarship offers to date, including offers from Alabama, Auburn, California, Louisville, Kansas, Nebraska, Stanford, Texas Tech and TCU.

Though he could play a number of different positions in college, Burkhead said his preference is to remain at the running back spot. Nebraska appears to be willing to give him that chance.

"In the Spring Game, I really loved how they (Nebraska) used their run-



Rex Burkhead



Nick Ash

ning backs in the offense," Burkhead said. "It kind of revolved around them in both the passing and running game. I definitely looked to see how they used their running backs, and seeing how they used them definitely interests you."

Nick Ash, a 6-5, 261-pound offensive guard prospect from Keller, Texas, also gave rave reviews to the Husker Spring Game atmosphere.

"I didn't really expect that many people to turn out," Ash said. "I thought that maybe, at most, 20,000 would show up. The atmosphere was phenomenal. Even though the fans cheered no matter what team scored, it still felt like a real game-day situa-

tion."

Ash, who holds scholarship offers from Houston, Nebraska, Texas Tech, Washington State and TCU, said the Huskers are definitely a team on his short list of favorites.

"It's probably Nebraska, Arizona, Penn State and Oklahoma," Ash said. "With Nebraska, it's just that they've always had a great offensive line tradition, and I'm excited about that."

Two other athletes holding Nebraska scholarship offers were also on hand for the spring game festivities. Quarterback Nathan Scheelhaase (6-3, 185) of Rockhurst High School in Kansas City, Mo., attended the game as did outside linebacker Shawn Bodtmann (6-0, 205) of Scranton, Pa., West High School.

All of the recruits who visited for the spring Game commented favorably about their experiences in Lincoln. They admitted, that seeing 80,000 plus fans in the stands for an intrasquad scrimmage was unexpected but impressive nonetheless. ■

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Bright Future

*Finish shows
that Huskers
'matured
a lot'*

**Stories By
Mike Babcock**

The future appears bright for the Nebraska men's basketball program. After all, only one player will be lost to graduation from a team that won 20 games and advanced to the second round of the National Invitation Tournament, despite an 0-4 start in Big 12 play.

Well, that one player was among the best in school history, Aleks Maric. The first-team, all-conference center from Sydney, Australia will be missed. "We're going to have to work harder in certain areas," sophomore guard Ryan Anderson said, stating the obvious.

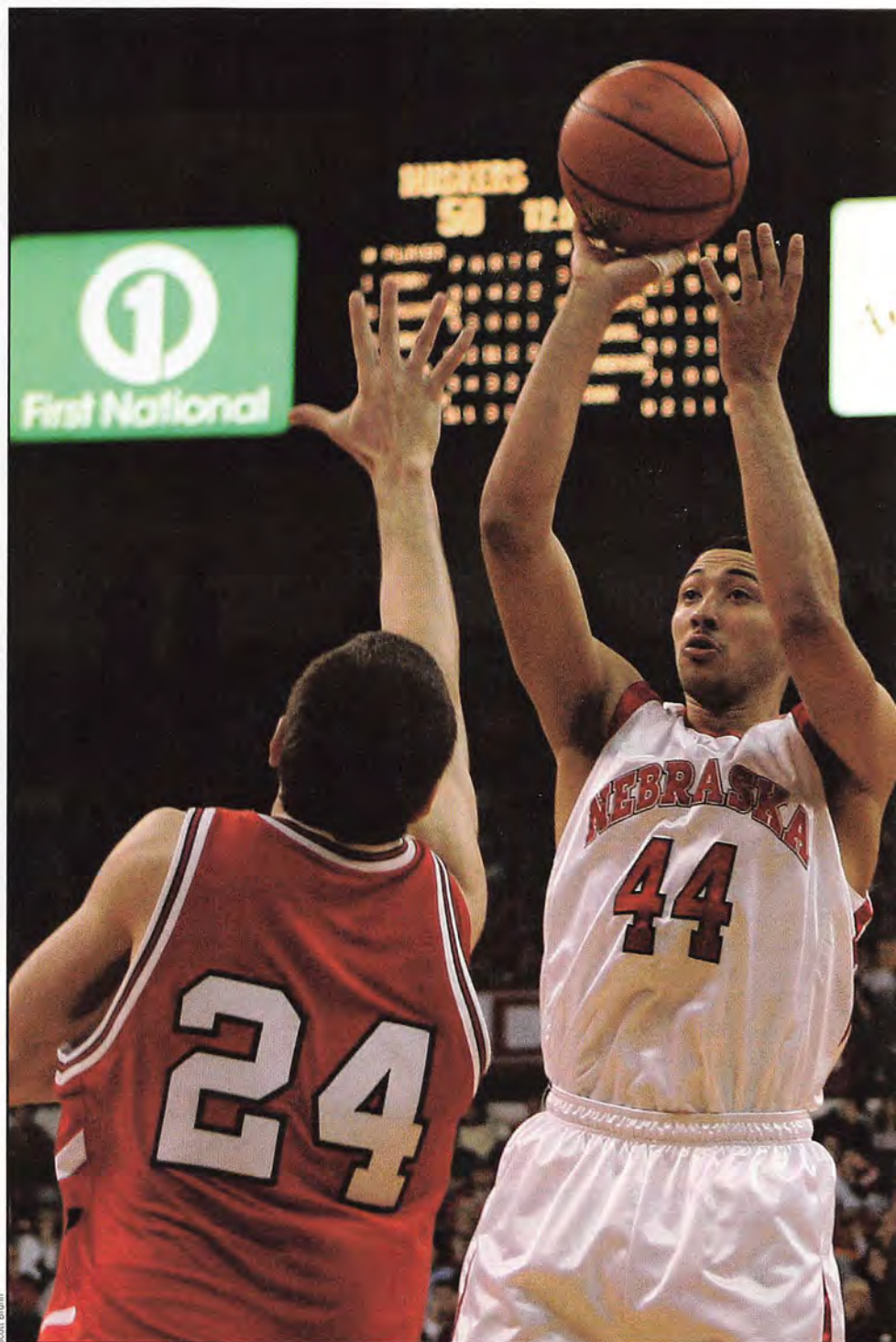


Aleks Maric

Certain areas such as scoring, rebounding and defense. Here are some numbers.

Maric led the Cornhuskers in scoring, averaging 15.7 points, and climbed to No. 5 on the school's all-time scoring list. Only Dave Hoppen (2,167), Eric Piatkowski (1,935), Jerry Fort (1,882) and Andre Smith (1,717) scored more points.

He led them in rebounding, averaging 10.2, the second-highest average in school history behind Chuck Jura's 11.2 in the 1971-72. His 335



Sophomore guard Ryan Anderson started every game and made 50 3-point shots to lead the Huskers.

rebounds tied the school single-season record. And his 1,015 career rebounds were second only to Venson

Hamilton's 1,080.

In addition to the 335 rebounds, Maric had personal highs in blocked

shots (57), assists (64) and steals (44) this season, to go out in style. So, yes, he'll definitely be missed.

However, the way the team finished, "I think we matured a lot," said Anderson.

The Huskers, a No. 3 seed, defeated Charlotte 67-48 at the Devaney Sports Center in the first round of the NIT, then took No. 2 seed Mississippi to overtime before losing 85-75 at Oxford, Miss. The Rebels then went on the road to upset No. 1 seed Virginia Tech 81-72 and advance to the semifinals in New York City, where they lost to Ohio State 81-69.

Nebraska wasn't all that far from Madison Square Garden. And really, considering the conference start, it wasn't all that far from earning an NCAA Tournament bid.

Home losses against Baylor (72-70) and Missouri (86-78 in overtime) and a loss at Colorado (55-51), in particular, proved fatal to the Huskers' NCAA aspirations.

"It's frustrating, man, but we'll get another year at it," Anderson said.

Anderson was the only Cornhusker besides Maric to start every game. He averaged a fraction of a minute more than Maric to lead the team in playing time. He averaged 8.4 points, fourth-best on the team. And he was second to Maric in rebounding, at 5.3 per game.

Nebraska will have only three seniors next season, Ade Dagunduro and walk-ons Paul Velander and Ben Nelson. So Anderson could find himself in a leadership role.

Even though Maric is the only loss to graduation, two scholarship players announced after the season that they would be transferring: junior Shang Ping and sophomore Jay-R Strowbridge, who played in 32 games, starting four, and was third on the team in 3-point shots (25).

Ping, a native of Haerbin, China, saw limited action in his first season



Coach Doc Sadler was given a two-year contract extension following the season. His contract now runs through June of 2014, with a base salary of \$800,000.

after transferring from Illinois Central Community College. He averaged 9.9 minutes in 21 games.

Four players were redshirted this season: freshmen Brandon Richardson, Alonzo Edwards and

Toney McCray and sophomore junior college transfer Alex Chapman.

Even they benefited from the tournament experience, according to Anderson. "Everybody kind of got to experience that feeling," he said. "It takes more hard work, a lot more hard work, to even get back to where we scratch the surface of . . . to exceed where we were."

An NCAA Tournament bid would be preferable next season.

Big 12 competition is good preparation. The conference was ranked the second-toughest in the nation this season, and Kansas, of course, was the NCAA champion.

"I kind of look at it like Kansas is



Brandon Richardson



Alonzo Edwards



Toney McCray



Alex Chapman



our big brother. We play them so much," said Anderson. "You're going to get them (Big 12 teams) at least once or twice."

Nebraska played the Jayhawks three times this season, losing 79-58 in Lincoln to open Big 12 play, 84-49 at Lawrence two weeks later and 64-54 in the second round of the conference tournament in Kansas City. "Playing in a conference like this, you get to play against the best of the best sometimes; this year THE best of the best," Anderson said.

NOTABLE

● The program's bright future also is reflected in coach Doc Sadler's being given a two-year contract extension following the season. His contract now runs through June of 2014, with a base salary of \$800,000, an increase of \$100,000. The contract also includes incentives, not only for team performance on the court but also for team performance in the classroom.

● With the transfers of Strowbridge and Ping and the graduation of Maric, Nebraska is one under the NCAA scholarship maximum of 13. Nebraska has signed two recruits: 6-foot-5 Roburt Sallie, a transfer from San Francisco City College, and 6-11 Christopher Niemann, a native of Germany whose eligibility is uncertain because of his participation on a club team there.

● No surprise here, Maric received the Jack Moore Award as the Cornhuskers' most outstanding player. His 26 career double-doubles in Big 12 games are a conference record. He is only the third player since the Big 12 was formed with career totals of 1,600 or more points and 1,000 or more rebounds. The others are Nick Collison of Kansas and Arthur Johnson of

Missouri.

● Maric was the first Cornhusker to be selected to an all-conference first team since 1999, when Venson Hamilton also earned Big 12 player-of-the-year recognition.

● Nebraska led the Big 12 and ranked 18th in the nation in scoring defense, allowing an average of 60.7 points per game — the second-lowest for the Cornhuskers since 1959. ■

MEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 20-13/Big 12: 7-9

Nov. 10	Presbyterian College	W 67-52
Nov. 17	Alabama A&M	W 59-42
Nov. 20	Norfolk State	W 83-48
Nov. 24	@Creighton	L 74-62
Nov. 26	IPFW	W 79-62
Dec. 2	Arizona State	W 62-47
Dec. 5	@Western Kentucky	L 69-62 (ot)
Dec. 9	Rutgers	W 63-51
Dec. 11	Savannah State	W 82-37
Dec. 15	Oregon (Qwest Center, Omaha)	W 88-79 (ot)
Dec. 22	North Carolina Central	W 71-28
Dec. 29	Alcorn State	W 77-53
Jan. 4	Maryland-East. Shore	W 86-50
Jan. 12	Kansas	L 79-58
Jan. 15	@Colorado	L 55-51
Jan. 19	Baylor	L 72-70
Jan. 26	@Kansas	L 84-49
Jan. 30	@Missouri	W 66-62
Feb. 2	Iowa State	W 64-56
Feb. 6	@Kansas State	L 74-59
Feb. 9	Texas Tech	W 73-62
Feb. 13	Missouri	L 86-78 (ot)
Feb. 16	@Iowa State	L 60-52
Feb. 20	Kansas State	W 71-64
Feb. 23	@Texas A&M	W 65-59
Feb. 27	Oklahoma	W 63-45
Mar. 1	@Oklahoma State	L 77-63
Mar. 4	@Texas	L 70-66
Mar. 9	Colorado	W 68-49
Mar. 13	*Missouri	W 61-56
Mar. 14	*Kansas	L 64-54
Mar. 19	**Charlotte	W 67-48
Mar. 24	***@Mississippi	L 85-75 (ot)

*Big 12 Tournament, Kansas City

**National Invitation Tournament

FINAL MEN'S STATISTICS

	I---TOTAL---			I---3-PTS---			I---REBOUNDS---													
Player	GP-GS	FG-FGA	Pct	3FG-A	Pct	FT-FTA	Pct	Off	Def	Tot	Avg	PF	FO	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Pts	Avg	
Maric, Aleks	33-33	191-332	.575	1-6	.167	136-207	.657	131	204	335	10.2	80	1	64	79	57	44	519	15.7	
Harley, Steve	32-20	105-247	.425	20-49	.408	61-86	.709	13	69	82	2.6	38	0	47	43	3	34	291	9.1	
Dagunduro, Ade	33-32	110-224	.491	16-44	.364	57-94	.606	44	74	118	3.6	89	3	55	62	11	30	293	8.9	
Anderson, Ryan	33-33	98-232	.422	50-136	.368	32-40	.800	37	139	176	5.3	86	3	57	42	1	47	278	8.4	
Miller, Cookie	30-24	63-164	.384	16-65	.246	40-59	.678	9	53	62	2.1	39	0	109	64	1	58	182	6.1	
Henry, Sek	33-19	69-175	.394	20-73	.274	36-58	.621	24	90	114	3.5	63	2	49	51	4	29	194	5.9	
Strowbridge, Jay-R	32-4	49-135	.363	25-68	.368	32-40	.800	11	37	48	1.5	47	0	52	36	0	11	155	4.8	
Velander, Paul	31-0	38-101	.376	36-94	.383	18-22	.818	2	19	21	0.7	31	0	20	8	2	14	130	4.2	
Ping, Shang	21-0	24-44	.545	2-7	.286	12-31	.387	14	16	30	1.4	28	0	7	17	7	5	62	3.0	
Balham, Chris	32-0	31-45	.689	0-0	.000	18-27	.667	19	30	49	1.5	32	0	6	20	6	3	80	2.5	
Nelson, Ben	9-0	3-7	.429	0-0	.000	2-3	.667	2	2	4	0.4	1	0	1	1	1	0	8	0.9	
Krenk, Nick	10-0	3-7	.429	2-5	.400	0-0	.000	1	3	4	0.4	0	0	3	5	0	1	8	0.8	
Salomon, Cole	20-0	4-11	.364	2-6	.333	0-0	.000	1	8	9	0.5	11	0	4	7	3	0	10	0.5	
Wicklund, Andrew	8-0	2-5	.400	0-2	.000	0-0	.000	0	3	3	0.4	0	0	1	3	0	1	4	0.5	
TEAM								34	42	76	2.3	1			5					
Total	33	790-1729	.457	190-555	.342	444-667	.666	342	789	1131	34.3	546	9	475	443	96	277	2214	67.1	
Opponents	33	687-1710	.402	243-668	.364	385-548	.703	338	725	1063	32.2	582	-	383	513	106	227	2002	60.7	

Winning in NCAA Big Step

Tournament performance 'shows the potential'

Three weeks had passed since Nebraska's 76-64 loss against Maryland in the second round of the NCAA Tournament, but the aches and pains of a long basketball season remained. "Stuff's still hurting a little bit," Kelsey Griffin said.

Stuff such as sore ribs, which were with her throughout her junior season. She suffered a cracked rib in the second half of the second exhibition game in early November and missed the final four nonconference games because of the injury.

Coach Connie Yori gave the team a week off before beginning offseason workouts. And the time away helped.

But "I don't know if I've not felt fatigued in the three years I've been here," said Griffin. "I think your body just kind of gets used to it."

In the same way, the Huskers may be getting used to advancing to the NCAA Tournament. Griffin hopes so. This was their second consecutive trip to the tournament and their fifth consecutive post-season appearance, a school record.

Not only did they earn an NCAA Tournament bid, as a No. 8 seed, they won an opening-round game for the first time since 1998, and only the

third time in school history. They defeated Xavier 61-58 before losing to No. 5 Maryland, the region's top seed, 76-64.

The games were played in College Park, Md. And Nebraska pushed the Terrapins, who had four starters from their 2006 NCAA championship team, to the end, even though Griffin and senior Danielle Page were in early foul trouble.

Griffin played 25 minutes and Page only 16 because of fouls. Nevertheless, the Huskers trailed 65-61 with 5:35 remaining — after Page had fouled out.

A minute earlier, the score had been 65-53.

The performance against Maryland, and the victory against Xavier, showed "the potential we have," said Griffin. "I think as far as what we learned, definitely, we can play with some of the best teams in the nation. The Big 12 really prepares us for that."

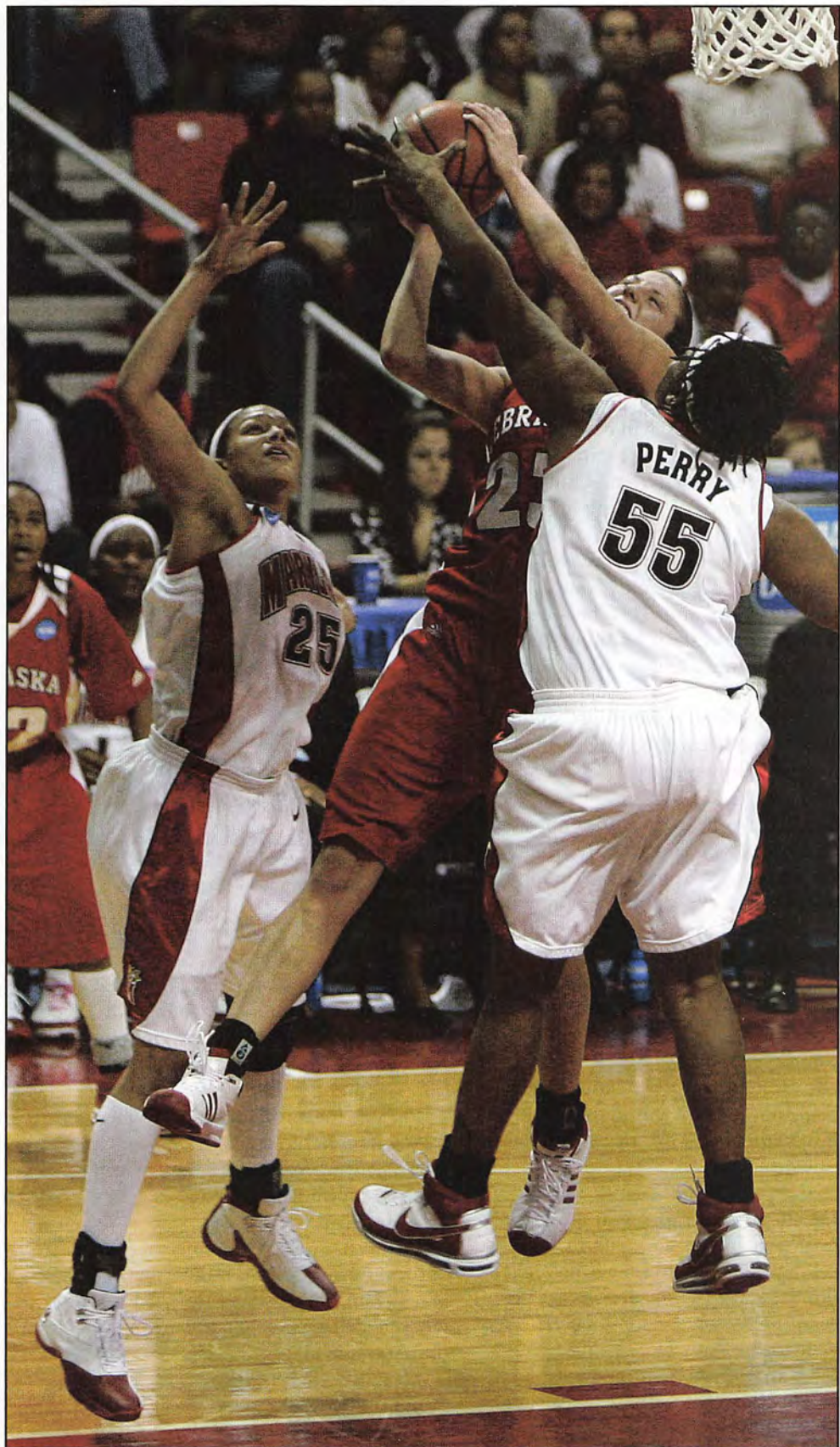
Yori is constantly reminding her players of the conference's quality. And that was born out in the tournament. Eight Big 12 teams earned NCAA bids. And all eight advanced to the second round, with Texas A&M losing in a regional final to eventual champ Tennessee, 53-45.



Photos by Scott Braun

Nebraska defeated the Aggies in Lincoln in late January, 73-60.

Maryland, which defeated Vanderbilt in the regional semis, also lost in the regional finals against Stanford, 98-87. The No. 4-seed



NU junior Kelsey Griffin (23) battled Maryland's inside players, finishing with nine points and seven rebounds, despite playing just 25 minutes because of foul trouble in the NCAA second-round game.

Cardinal advanced to the championship game with an 82-73 victory against Connecticut, losing against Tennessee, 64-48.

Comparative scores can be misleading, of course. But the Huskers' success in 2007-08 bodes well for the future. They learned that earning an

NCAA Tournament bid shouldn't be the goal, rather, advancing in the tournament should be, according to Griffin.

"For a while, we just wanted to get there," she said. "That was good enough. Now we know we're capable of getting there. It's advancing, really putting Nebraska on the map."

Perennial women's basketball powers such as Tennessee and Connecticut "play with great confidence," Griffin said. "They know their shots are going to go in. They know what they're capable of. I think the more we play great teams like Maryland and the great teams in our league, we'll have that confidence going in. It will definitely help us in the tourney."

"Our goal is to get together a system here where we will be that type of team. Is it there yet? No. Is there potential? Definitely. And I think with our experience of winning a game in the NCAA we'll have that kind of mindset. We expect to play well."

Nebraska loses only one player, Page. Griffin and 11 others return. And the process of building another NCAA Tournament team has already begun.

Expectations will be high, and they should be, according to Griffin. "It's not any unnecessary pressure," she said. "I think it's all founded. We've done it two years in a row now, and that should be consistently done. As far as people (recruits) coming in, they should expect that they're going to go (to the tournament) and they're going to do well."

"With that kind of mindset, it will bring more — not to say that our practices weren't intense — but something even harder to work toward, the reason why you go hard in every drill, not just to win games but you have this bigger prize to work toward."

Griffin ranked among the Big 12 top 10 in scoring, rebounding, field goal percentage and free throw percentage and earned first-team all-conference recognition for a second consecutive season. So she'll be expected to lead the way, by words as well as by example.

She hasn't thought much about next season being her last at Nebraska. Her biggest concern is "being a vocal leader, which is something Coach Yori talks to me about every year. She says, 'You lead by example, but we really need you to vocalize, encourage,'" Griffin said. "I've really been trying to worry on



Danielle Page played just 16 minutes in her final game as a Husker, managing four points, five rebounds and two blocks.

that more so than worry about playing time or anything."

There's at least one thing she can't work on during the offseason. Assistant coach Tory Verdi "gets on me about not 'pulling' my jersey," said Griffin.

Players tug on their jerseys when they're winded to signal to the bench they need a break. "I've never been good at pulling my jersey to get a sub," she said.

Without such a signal, no one knows when Griffin might need a break. She never slows down. Even when her ribs are sore and starting to hurt she was taking charges.

"I guess that's what I've been taught: Why be out here if you're not going to give it your all? Why play if it's not going to be 100 percent? So I try my very hardest not to pace myself. Plus, in the system we play that's not one of the things you're supposed to do," she said.

"You're definitely taught not to (pace yourself). And that's just kind

of how I play."

Not kind of, it IS how she plays. After she scored a game-high 26 points against Xavier, Yori said: "I've been a head coach for 18 years at the college level, and I don't know if I've coached a player more tough than Griffin. She's got a great mental toughness."

NOTABLE

- Besides the physical demands of the season, Griffin has dealt with the emotional demands of her dad Jim's undergoing cancer chemotherapy. The good news is he's doing better.

- Yori, to the Lincoln Journal Star, on Griffin: "I don't think she's a household name in Lincoln, and she should be because she's a great player." Griffin's 15.3 points-per-game average ranked seventh in the conference. She had seven double-doubles.

- Page, who earned all-conference honorable mention, finished her senior season second on the team to Griffin in scoring and rebounding and broke the school single-season record with 78 blocked shots. She finished second in career blocks with 207.

● Sophomore guard Yvonne Turner scored a game-high 23 points in the loss against Maryland, hitting 5-of-9 3-point shots. She led the Big 12 in conference games averaging 2.6 steals and was named to the Big 12 All-Defensive Team.

● Nebraska's previous NCAA Tournament victories were in 1998 against New Mexico (76-59) at Norfolk, Va., and in 1993 against San Diego (81-58) in Lincoln. The NCAA Tournament appearance was the Huskers' eighth. They lost to Temple 64-61 last season in Raleigh, N.C. ■

WOMEN'S RESULTS

Overall: 21-12/Big 12: 9-7

Nov. 9	UTEP	W 81-74
Nov. 11	Mississippi	W 80-59
Nov. 17	Florida	W 90-63
Nov. 23	*Marist	L 66-59
Nov. 24	*Utah	L 56-44
Nov. 25	*Akron	W 75-47
Nov. 30	Creighton	W 79-65
Dec. 2	Robert Morris	W 73-58
Dec. 8	USC	W 87-69
Dec. 13	@Cal State Bakersfield	W 66-62
Dec. 15	@Long Beach State	W 75-52
Dec. 22	@Ohio State	L 86-74
Dec. 30	Denver	W 73-38
Jan. 2	Arkansas-Pine Bluff	W 67-39
Jan. 9	Texas	W 56-45
Jan. 12	Kansas	W 71-51
Jan. 16	@Oklahoma	L 80-72
Jan. 19	@Iowa State	W 82-72
Jan. 23	Texas A&M	W 73-60
Jan. 26	@Baylor	L 76-56
Jan. 30	Kansas State	L 77-75
Feb. 3	@Missouri	W 73-67
Feb. 6	@Colorado	W 80-71
Feb. 10	Oklahoma State	L 92-81
Feb. 17	@Kansas	L 62-61
Feb. 21	Missouri	W 73-57
Feb. 24	@Texas Tech	L 65-56
Feb. 27	@Kansas State	L 69-65
Mar. 2	Colorado	W 63-55
Mar. 5	Iowa State	W 55-45
Mar. 11	**Kansas	L 73-67
Mar. 23	***Xavier	W 61-58
Mar. 25	***Maryland	L 76-64

*Oahu Classic

**Big 12 Tournament, Kansas City

***NCAA Tournament, College Park, Md.



Sophomore guard Yvonne Turner erupted for a career-high 23 points to lead the Huskers against Maryland. Her total included a career-best five three-pointers.

FINAL WOMEN'S STATISTICS

		I---TOTAL---			I---3-PTS---			I---REBOUNDS---															
Player	GP-GS	FG-FGA	Pct	3FG-A	Pct	FT-FTA	Pct	Off	Def	Tot	Avg	PF	FO	A	TO	Blk	Stl	Pts	Avg				
Griffin, Kelsey	29-29	158-295	.536	1-7	.143	127-176	.722	58	150	208	7.2	55	1	30	64	25	40	444	15.3				
Page, Danielle	33-33	157-360	.436	7-20	.350	74-108	.685	53	163	216	6.5	68	1	45	81	78	28	395	12.0				
Montgomery, Cory	33-4	124-253	.490	16-46	.348	45-61	.738	58	89	147	4.5	42	0	19	39	4	10	309	9.4				
Turner, Yvonne	33-33	96-216	.444	37-114	.325	48-73	.658	35	75	110	3.3	74	0	77	87	9	81	277	8.4				
Hester, Tay	33-33	85-200	.425	5-27	.185	41-78	.526	37	98	135	4.1	89	3	67	93	3	35	216	6.5				
Kelley, Dominique	33-33	65-148	.439	17-45	.378	63-88	.716	26	71	97	2.9	62	0	66	54	0	22	210	6.4				
Burke, Kaitlyn	33-0	63-162	.389	33-104	.317	18-25	.720	10	40	50	1.5	42	0	78	52	2	22	177	5.4				
Kuhlmann, Kala	30-0	31-82	.378	6-20	.300	16-19	.842	29	31	60	2.0	31	0	45	38	0	11	84	2.8				
Neals, Nicole	33-0	32-101	.317	17-66	.258	2-9	.222	1	16	17	0.5	13	0	31	30	0	9	83	2.5				
Redmon, Catheryn	16-0	16-30	.533	0-0	.000	7-12	.583	12	24	36	2.3	22	1	2	11	9	4	39	2.4				
Bober, Nikki	33-0	20-56	.357	1-4	.250	16-29	.552	20	37	57	1.7	0	0	18	18	8	4	57	1.7				
Periago, Jessica	10-0	3-8	.375	1-2	.500	2-2	1.000	1	2	3	0.3	3	0	1	4	0	0	9	0.9				
Whittaker, Monique	10-0	2-4	.500	0-0	.000	3-4	.750	2	2	4	0.4	2	0	1	3	0	0	7	0.7				
TEAM								66	60	126	3.8	0	11										
Total	33	852-1915	.445	141-455	.310	462-684	.675	408	858	1266	38.4	533	6	480	585	138	266	2307	69.9				
Opponents	33	799-1967	.406	154-447	.345	333-455	.732	390	786	1176	35.6	607	-	378	627	129	300	2085	63.2				

Now, He's

Junior Sullivan turns things around after frustrating season

By Mike Babcock

The experience was meant to be relaxing. Instead, it was humbling, not in and of itself but rather because of the result, which led to frustration and required patience.

"I kind of kicked myself in the butt for it," Nick Sullivan said.

The junior outfielder from Arvada, Colo., has emerged this baseball season. In late March, he was the Big 12 Player of the Week, after hitting .444 with nine runs-batted-in in five games. Through the first 31 games, he was hitting .326 with three home runs and 27 RBIs.

Those numbers are in marked contrast to last season's, when he played in 30 games, batting .192 with four RBIs. He had expected to play better. Hence the frustration.

Coach Mike Anderson reminds players who deal with adversity that they might be disappointed but they should never be discouraged. "Discouraged means you're losing it mentally," he said. "And we want to make sure you stay with it.

"Disappointment happens, and we can learn from that. But discouragement, boy, that can go off in the wrong direction. So let's keep our discouragement down."

Sullivan almost crossed the discouragement line. He was "close, you know, close," said Anderson. "I think

the 'thumb thing' was as close as you can get.

"He had started to become a team leader. He was becoming a leader and doing all those things and then, bam, this happens to him and he's not playing."

The "thumb thing" was a broken thumb, suffered over Christmas break while skiing. It required six weeks to heal and then rehab. And the effects lingered.

"I couldn't get it going," Sullivan said. "It was frustrating."

It was more frustrating than his first season had been. He had arrived at Nebraska expecting to play, as most freshmen do. His high school resume included a .526 batting average, with 10 home runs, 31 RBIs and 33 runs scored as a senior. He was a multi-sport athlete, a first-team All-Colorado football player, a quarterback and defensive back. He was ready.

But every freshman boasts comparable numbers, "at their high school is the stud," said Sullivan. "And when you come here and you don't play, it's kind of frustrating.

"Eventually, you've just got to know things will work out."

A couple of weeks into the season, he realized redshirting was for the best. He wasn't going to crack a lineup that included outfielders Daniel Bruce, Jesse Boyer, Brandon Fusilier and Andy Gerch. The 2005



Cornhuskers had Alex Gordon and Joba Chamberlain. And they won a school-record 57 times, including once at the College World Series.

Sullivan watched on television. School was out and the redshirts had gone home.

Got It Going



Junior Nick Sullivan homered and drove in a career-high five runs as Nebraska completed a sweep of Texas Tech with a 5-3 victory April 6.

Nebraska hadn't needed him. "I realized that even if I would have been playing that year, I wouldn't have played much," Sullivan said. "So it was beneficial for me.

"And it was beneficial for the

team."

Sullivan played for the Pueblo (Colo.) Chieftains, who finished ninth at the National Baseball Congress World Series at Wichita, that summer and returned to Nebraska ready to

contribute. He played well in the fall and was a situational player in the spring.

He got 66 official at-bats in 36 games, hitting .318 with two home runs and 12 RBIs. The second of the home runs, with two on base, came against No. 6 Texas and Big 12 "Pitcher of the Year" Kyle McCulloch at the Big 12 Tournament in Oklahoma City.

Nebraska won 6-5 to advance to the championship game.

Sullivan hadn't played as much as he would have liked as a redshirted freshman. But he was progressing and ready for his sophomore season. Again he played well in the fall. In fact, he "enjoyed a breakthrough fall," according to the media guide.

He led the team in hitting and was second in home runs and RBIs.

Then he went home for Christmas break — and some skiing to relax.

Sullivan has set aside last season. He doesn't talk much about it, and then only if asked. He plays left field — he hadn't made an error through 31 games — and bats in the middle of the order, not just against right-handed pitchers. "He's earned his time defensively, and he's earned his time at the plate," said Anderson. "It really is an earned process for him."

Dealing with the thumb injury, in particular, "was a tough time," Anderson said. "But he had the demeanor and the personality that he was doing everything right off the field. He was doing everything right academically. He represented our program exactly the way we wanted."

He has been on the Big 12 Commissioner's Honor Roll seven consecutive semesters, with a 3.79 cumulative grade-point average in finance. He was first-team Academic All-Big 12 as a sophomore. And he has been the baseball team's representative to the Student-Athlete

Advisory Committee the past three years. "We didn't want to lose a kid like that," Anderson said.

"So it was easy to be patient with him."

Teammates have given him a hard time about the skiing accident, though not right after it happened, of course. "But that's OK," said Sullivan.

He thought about the frustration and uncertainty that followed.

"I didn't go (skiing) this year," he said.

SMALL WORLD

Among the schools that recruited Sullivan out of high school was Dallas Baptist, where Cornhusker pitching coach Eric Newman had been an assistant and would be the head coach in 2005 - when Sullivan was a freshman. "I remember talking to him a couple of times," said Sullivan. "When he came here, we joked around once in a while. 'It's a small world, it really is.'"

Sullivan also considered Northern Colorado and New Mexico State. But Nebraska was his clear choice. "Just the atmosphere and the way they treat you here, it's a unique place, a top-notch program," he said. "This is every kid's dream to go to a big university like this and play."

TOUGH TO HANDLE

Junior left-hander Dan Jennings pitched 30.1 consecutive scoreless innings before Creighton finally managed a run on a sacrifice fly in the Cornhuskers' 4-3 victory at Hawks Field on April 22. That was the only run Jennings allowed, on three hits, in six innings. He earned the victory, his fifth without a loss, and dropped his earned-run average to 1.59. He also had five saves and had struck out 48 in 51 innings. Opponents were hitting .145 against him.

The 30.1 consecutive scoreless innings rank second all-time at Nebraska. Justin Pekarek pitched 33.1 innings without allowing a run in 2004. Jamie Rodriguez (2000) and Phil Harrison (1984) each had streaks of 27.1 scoreless innings and are now tied for third.



Dan Jennings

BIG DIFFERENCE

Senior catcher Mitch Abeita has flourished as the clean-up hitter. Through 36 games, Abeita was hitting



Nick Sullivan (21) is congratulated by teammate Mitch Abeita (13) after hitting a three-run homer against Texas Tech.

.357 with seven home runs and 31 RBIs. He ranked second in the Big 12 in on-base percentage (.497), seventh in slugging percentage (.607) and ninth in batting average.

Through 36 games last season, the transfer from North Central Texas College was batting .270 with no home runs, 12 RBIs, a .354 slugging percentage and a .360 on-base percentage. He also had five stolen bases this season, compared to none a year ago.

YOUTH MOVEMENT

The Cornhuskers have used 10 freshmen, true or redshirted, this season, including seven who have started at least once: Ben Kline, Dan Johnston, Tyler Rank, David Stewart, Andy Cotton, Brett Sowers and pitcher Casey Hauptman.

Kline, a true freshman and two-time all-state selection from Omaha Central High School, has stepped in as the regular shortstop and drawn comparisons to former Cornhusker shortstop Joe Simokaitis, who is playing with the Chicago Cubs' Triple-A team.

Simokaitis hit .236 in 51 games as a freshman, scoring 41 runs, with eight

doubles and 15 RBIs. In his first 36 games, (33 starts) Kline was hitting .257 with 15 runs, seven doubles and 15 RBIs. And his fielding percentage was slightly higher (.952 to .941).

TOUGH TICKET

The football team drew a record crowd of 80,149 for the Red-White Spring Game. Later that day, the baseball team drew 8,697 to Hawks Field at Haymarket Park for the second of a three-game series against Kansas. Though not a record, it was close. The only larger crowds were for the Texas A&M game (8,757) on April 14, 2006 and for the Miami game in the NCAA Super Regional (8,711) on June 11, 2005. The ballpark opened in 2002.

NOT A TOUGH MONTH

The Cornhuskers were 19-2-1 in March, the second-best winning percentage during a month (.886) in school history. The losses were against Arkansas and Texas, the tie with Oklahoma because of a Big 12 rule regarding travel on the last day of a series. Nebraska went 22-0 in March of 1983. The most victories in a month were 25 in April of 1979.

The Arkansas loss snapped a 14-game winning streak, tied for the fourth-longest in school history. The 1983 team won 26 in a row from March 7 to April 7 but struggled in conference play, finishing the season 44-15 overall but 8-10 in the Big Eight. ■



Ben Kline



Nebraska third baseman Heidi Foland makes a diving catch during NU's sweep of South Dakota State in early April.

SOFTBALL NOTES

IT'S A HIT

Junior Darcy Rutherford, the Huskers' leadoff hitter, was also their leading hitter through the first 40 games. Her batting average was .350 and she had reached base safely in 37 of those games, including a streak of 30 that ended in the first game of a double-header against Baylor. Rutherford also had a 15-game hitting streak during that stretch, four short of the second-longest in school history.

Rutherford also reached base seven times as a result of being hit by pitches through the first 40 games. The school single-season record for being hit by pitches is 10, set by Trisha Tannahill in 2006.

RUN TROUBLES

Opponents scored more runs in the first 33 games this season (122) than all of last season (120 in 57 games). Conference opponents scored more runs in the first seven games (42) than all of last season (41 in 18 games). The Huskers scored only three runs, combined, in their first seven Big 12 games, all losses. They finally got their first conference victory in the second game of a double-header against Baylor. Sophomore right-hander Alex Hupp shut out the Bears on three hits, 5-0.

CLEARLY CRYSTAL

Junior Crystal Carwile was the team's leading hitter in Big 12 games with six to go. She was batting .333. Carwile was closing in on 100 career runs and 100 career RBIs. She already had reached 100 career hits. Only six other players in school history have totaled 100 or more in each of those categories, and only one, three-time All-American Ali Viola, reached those totals before her senior season.

Viola (1995-98) had 262 hits, 213 RBIs and 157 runs. The others were: Tobin Echo-Hawk (1993-96) 266-134-168; Jennifer Lizama (1997-2000) 254-135-199; Amanda Buchholz (2000-03) 184-115-127; Kim Ogee (2000-03) 263-113-182; and Nicole Trimboli (2001-04) 232-126-173.



Crystal Carwile

Carwile also had nine career home runs in conference games with six to go, sixth most in school history.

DOUBLE HUNDRED

Junior Meghan Mullin got career base hit No. 100, beating out a bunt in the first inning of an 8-2 loss at Oklahoma State on April 20. Mullin was second on the team in hitting, behind Rutherford, with a .333 average. Carwile also recorded her 100th career hit this season.

NO DURAN

Junior catcher Amanda Duran suffered a hand injury on April 5, underwent surgery four days later and was lost for the season. She was batting .279 with a team-high eight doubles. Her 20 runs-batted-in still ranked second to Carwile after 40 games. Freshman Ashley Guile, who replaced Duran, suffered a concussion in the second game of the double-header against Baylor.

PICKING UP THE PACE

Freshman Julie Brechtel managed only three hits in her first 27 official collegiate at-bats. But then she got seven hits in seven consecutive at-bats, and reached base 10 consecutive times.

HOME PITCHING WOES

From the start of the 2006 season until a double-header against Oklahoma, Husker pitching was 42-6 with a 0.99 earned-run average at Bowlin Stadium. The Sooners were shutout through the first four innings, before breaking out. They hit six home runs and scored 18 runs over the final 10 innings of the double-header, winning 6-0 and 11-1. The 11 runs in the second game were a record by an opponent at Bowlin Stadium. The previous record was seven.

NO. 600

The Huskers' 5-3 victory against Utah Valley State in the Rebel Round Robin in Las Vegas in mid-March was coach Rhonda Revell's 600th at Nebraska. Despite getting six hits in the first three innings, the Huskers had to rally from a 2-1 deficit in the fifth inning. ■



NU sophomore Erin Hannon tied for second in the high jump and finished sixth in the pentathlon at the Big 12 Indoor Championships.

Being Herself

Husker sophomore uses sense of humor to alleviate pressure

By KATELYN KERKHOVE

When Erin Hannon got a phone call from the Nebraska track and field coaching staff, there was only one problem — she didn't know where Nebraska was.

Even though she assumed there would be nothing but cornfields, however, the sophomore from Bradford, Pa.

made the trip to Lincoln in hopes of finding her home for the next five years.

"When my mom told me I was taking a recruiting trip to Nebraska, I didn't understand why I would go there," Hannon said. "But all the other coaches on the phone told me I'd get this feeling that that's where I would want to be, and I didn't get that feeling until I came here."

An outstanding high school recruit, Hannon qualified for the

AAA state high school meet in four events each of her four years. She claimed state titles in the triple jump and high jump her senior year.

Several universities recruited her, including Virginia, Connecticut, Louisville and Clemson, but Nebraska proved to be the best choice.

Once in the state, the adjustment was "kind of rough," she said. Close to both her parents, Hannon said she felt the loneliest at Nebraska's first indoor meet a year ago, when she looked up in the stands and didn't see the faces of her mom and dad for the first time ever.

The distance hasn't stopped Hannon from being herself during competition, however. Making friends comes easily to the recently declared psychology major. She willingly jokes with everyone at meets, from teammates and coaches to officials and opponents.

Her quick wit and quirky personality make her one of multi-event coach Kris Grimes' most enthusiastic athletes.

"I think she brought her personality with her from home," Grimes said.

"She's absolutely a goof ball, and I don't mind saying it. I think for the group in general, she brings a positive atmosphere for officials, athletes or coaches."

Hannon said she's a "great big ball of fun" because it takes the pressure off. "It makes the serious atmosphere not as serious," she said. That helped her make the transition from the jumps to multi-events last year.

Hannon has competed in the pentathlon, which includes the 200 meters, 800 meters, 60-meter hurdles, high jump, long jump and shot put during the indoor season. She adds the javelin to compete in the heptathlon during the outdoor season.

A natural athlete, Hannon has the ability to score points at the conference level for the Huskers as a multi-event competitor, Grimes said. But her main stage is the high jump, where she could find herself competing on the national stage sometime soon in her career.

While she would like to focus on the high jump — to become a consistent 5-10 jumper — Hannon said she understands her team needs her to score points and, since she can, she is

more than willing to keep practicing the several events required for the heptathlon.

Hannon's proudest moments in a meet so far came at the Big 12 Conference Indoor Championships at the Bob Devaney Sports Center, Feb. 29-March 1. She tied for second in the high jump, clearing 5-8, and finished sixth in the pentathlon with 3,648 points.

"She's definitely on the right track," Grimes said. "She's one of the most explosive athletes I've ever coached. Sometimes she'll be on the other side of the track doing walk-overs or backflips and it's unbelievable. It's just about channeling that energy."

Hannon said the pressure is on to compete well in all of her events. With one year behind her, she knows the routine and understands what she needs to do to compete on the national level.

"You have to have confidence in yourself," she said. "It doesn't matter if Coach thinks you can do it, if your teammates think you can do it. If you don't believe it in yourself that you are just as good as everybody else out there, it doesn't really matter." ■

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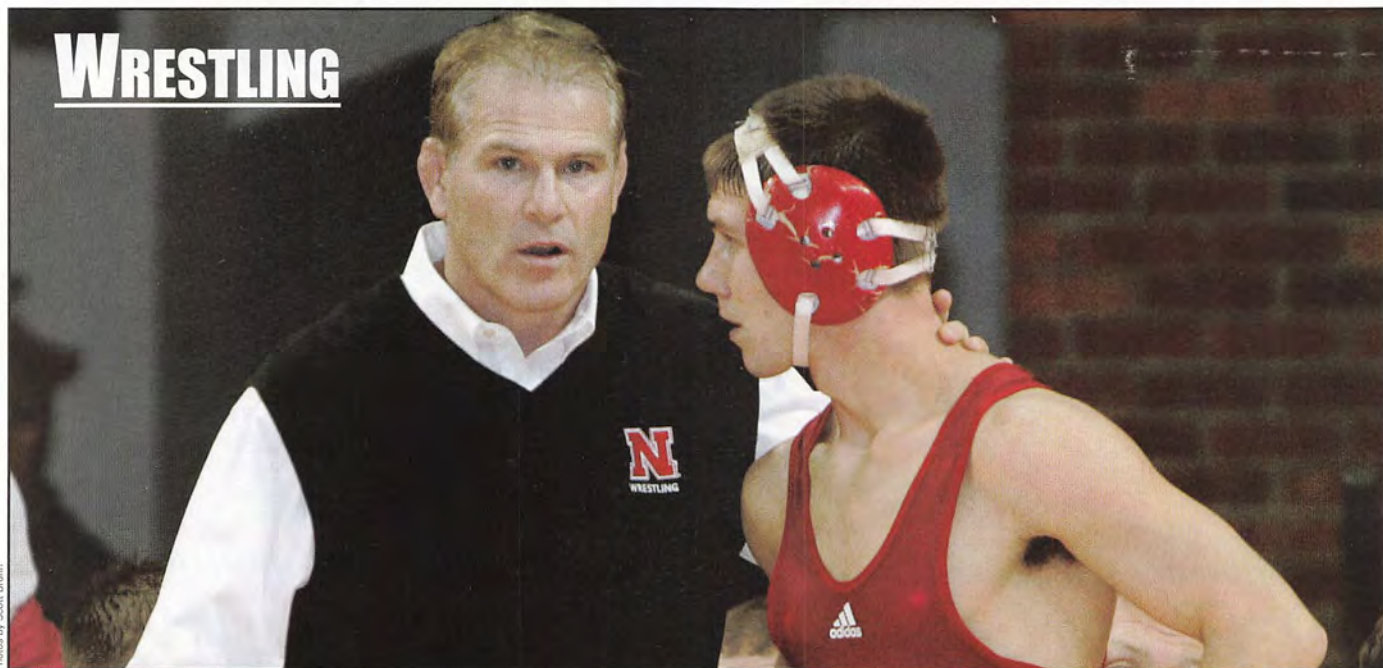
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NU freshman Anthony Ingrelli advanced to the still rings individual qualifying session at the NCAA Championships April 18 in Palo Alto, Calif. Ingrelli posted his fourth best score of the season with a 15.10 but did not advance to the finals.

WRESTLING



Nebraska wrestling coach Mark Manning was selected as Big 12 Coach of the Year. (More in Notebook, Page 35)



Senior Sarah Pavan (volleyball) and senior Stephen Tétrault (gymnastics) earned student-athlete-of-the-year awards at the 18th annual Student-Athlete Recognition Banquet April 20 at the Bob Devaney Sports Center. Pavan is the fifth Husker volleyball player to be named. Tétrault is the fourth member of the men's gymnastics team to be named. Nearly 200 student-athletes were honored as Medallion recipients for their academic achievement during the last year, with 60 earning highest honors and 45 more capturing high honors. Also presented were the 14th annual Herman Awards, named after the Dick and Dale Herman families, for the highest team grade-point average. The awards went to the men's tennis team for the sixth time and the women's cross country team for the seventh time.

'Mind-boggling' Crowd

Talk of a sellout didn't surprise Anthony West. After all, the redshirted freshman cornerback from San Diego attended the 2006 Spring Game on a recruiting visit.

And Memorial Stadium was about as full as it could be that afternoon.

Because of construction on the Tom and Nancy Osborne Complex, the north stands were closed. Otherwise, "they would have had those (seats) full, too," West said.

He was shocked at the time by the size of the crowd, officially 57,415. But not now, not as he looks back. That's how Nebraska football fans are. So when a sellout was the goal for Bo Pelini's first Spring Game as head coach, West figured it would be achieved.

"I thought it was realistic. I thought it could be done easily because of the fans and how great they are here in Nebraska," he said three days before the game-conditions scrimmage.

Never underestimate the commitment of Cornhusker fans. "Never," said West.

Still, this year's attendance was remarkable, a record 80,149. Sure, Alabama's Spring Game a year ago, the first under coach Nick Saban, drew 92,138. But those fans were admitted free. Cornhusker fans paid to watch the final practice of the spring.

Face value for reserved-seat tickets was \$10, while general admission tickets were priced at \$8. University students and former players were admitted free, as were youngsters who took a drug-free pledge, conducted by Pelini and former Cornhuskers Demorrio Williams and Adam Carriker, at half-time. But everyone else paid. And tickets were gone 10 days in advance.

In fact, scalpers reportedly were getting as much as \$90 to \$100 for tickets.

"People are excited. They want to come. That's great," quarterback Joe Ganz said two days before the game. "Obviously, Coach Pelini's doing something well."

Still, \$100 to watch a glorified practice? "I wouldn't pay it," said Ganz. "I don't have 100 bucks. I'm broke, man. I'm a broke college kid, so I know I wouldn't pay it."

"That's ridiculous. Those people are crazy."

Offensive coordinator Shawn Watson just smiled when asked about the interest in the Spring Game. "There's no place like Nebraska," he said, also two days before.

"It's different. You know, I tell you what you do, you really appreciate it as a coach because it's really important. And they're very supportive. They're unbelievable fans. They're loyal to the very end. I mean, they're with you. They're just great fans."

That day's practice had been conducted indoors, in the Hawks Championship Center, because of inclement weather. Day-long rain and cool temperatures had forced the cancellation of a late-afternoon Husker softball game against Iowa State.

Friday's weather wasn't much better. It was cold and windy.

But the day of the Spring Game dawned clear and bright.



A long line of fans waits for the gates to open 1 1/2 hours before the annual Spring Game April 19.

The temperature at kickoff was 62 degrees, with only a light breeze out of the north.

"It's mind-boggling," wide receiver Todd Peterson said afterward. "We've still got the coaches out there, a lot of them out on the field, helping us. It's still a practice and we've got twice my hometown, two times as many people as I'm used to growing up out there, watching the game. It's just a testament to the fans. They're never going to leave us. They love Nebraska football, and we can't thank them enough for coming out and supporting us."

Like Peterson, who is from Grand Island, Neb., defensive end Barry Turner was a Spring Game veteran. "We had 60,000, 55,000 (in the past), which I thought was amazing just for a practice," he said.

Though there were officials, four quarters and two teams, selected at mid-week through a draft process, it was still a practice, the last of 15 allowed in the spring.

"I've got a buddy who plays at Miami, and their Spring Game is nothing. They hardly get anybody, so soldout for a Spring Game, it's exciting. He doesn't believe it," said West. "Nobody I talk to could believe it. This is something, I think, you've got to see."

"Down there, he's used to maybe a few people coming out and watching a practice, but this is like a normal game or something, like SC (Southern California) or something like that. It's like a game atmosphere. It's something you've got to experience. It's exciting."

Pelini summed up the excitement afterward.

"I thought it was a pretty special atmosphere," he said. "I want to thank the fans and everybody who came out today. That's something, obviously, I've never been a part of before. I don't know if any of these coaches have, that kind of turnout, passion and enthusiasm for the Spring Game. I thought it was something special. And I think everybody." ■

NEBRASKA'S PREVIOUS FIVE SPRING GAMES

2007	— 54,288
2006	— 57,415
2005	— 63,416
2004	— 61,417
2003	— 33,419

Quick Hits

WELCOME HOME

Among Tom Osborne's first orders of business as athletic director was to bring former Cornhusker football players back into the fold. Coach Bo Pelini has followed suit, welcoming them to practice, personally greeting as many as possible.

A year ago, two golf tournaments involving former players were held in Lincoln on the weekend of the Spring Game, reflecting the rift in the program. This year, only one tournament was held, sponsored by the Lettermen's Club, and though inclement weather interceded, a flood of former players were in town and attended the Spring Game, watching from the sidelines.

Though the golf tournament was rained out, "it gave us an opportunity to interact and be around all those former players," said Pelini. "I was able to meet a lot of new guys.

"I think the special thing is they realize they're always welcome here and that we want them around our program. They're the ones who helped to build this place and make it what it is today, and they're passionate about it. We hope to see them around very often."

On the Friday night before the Spring Game, the athletic department unveiled the Nebraska Football Lettermen Wall, which lists the names of every varsity football letter-winner. Osborne and N-Club president Mitch Krenk led a ribbon-cutting ceremony for the wall.

The wall is adjacent to the doors that lead from the locker room beneath the North Stadium stands and includes 3,202 bricks on which the names of players and the year they last earned a letter are listed. The tiles were donated and engraved by Endicott Clay in Fairbury, Neb.

Current players will pass the wall when they take the field. "It has historical significance, honors a great tradition and connects players of the past to the present and future," Osborne said.



Tom Osborne

BACK TO HATTIESBURG

Southern Mississippi returns to the Nebraska football schedule with a three-game series beginning on Sept. 1, 2012 at Memorial Stadium. The Cornhuskers will travel to Southern Mississippi for a game on Sept. 7, 2013, and the Golden Eagles will come to Lincoln again on Sept. 5, 2015. Nebraska previously announced nonconference games scheduled against UCLA for 2012 and 2013, the first at Pasadena, Calif., the second in Lincoln.

AMONG THE MISSING

If you keep track of football scholarship recruits and wonder why Austin Stafford and Seth Jensen weren't listed on the rosters for the Spring Game, Stafford, a linebacker, didn't practice during the spring for what Pelini called personal reasons and Jensen, a defensive lineman, left the team, again for undisclosed reasons. In addition, walk-on linebacker Kyle Moore, the brother of former Cornhusker Jay Moore, decided to transfer.

Jensen, from Fort Morgan, Colo., and Moore, from Elkhorn, Neb., would have been sophomores. Stafford, from Hayward, Calif., will be a redshirted freshman.

Offensive guard Andy Christensen was indefinitely suspended for an off-field matter and didn't participate in spring practice.

WRESTLING WRAP-UP

The wrestling team finished fourth at the NCAA Championships in St. Louis in late March, with five Cornhuskers earning All-America recognition. The team finish was Nebraska's highest since 1993 (third), and the five All-Americans were the most since 1995.

The All-Americans were: junior Paul Donahoe, third at 125 pounds; sophomore Jordan Burroughs, third at 149 pounds; junior Brandon Browne, fourth at 174 pounds; sophomore Craig

Brester, fourth at 197 pounds; and sophomore Stephen Dwyer, eighth at 165 pounds.

Iowa won the championship, followed by Ohio State and Penn State. Nebraska finished one place ahead of the Big 12's Iowa State and Oklahoma State, which tied for fifth.

The Huskers finished second to Iowa State in the conference championships.

CONGRATS TO MANNING

Husker wrestling coach Mark Manning was selected as Big 12 Coach of the Year in a vote of conference coaches. Manning, in his eighth year at Nebraska, became only the second coach in school history to record 100 dual victories. His dual record is 109-42-2. This season, the Huskers were undefeated in conference duals for the first time in the program's 98-year history.

In late January, the Huskers defeated Oklahoma State for only the third time, 22-13.

TRACK ALL-AMERICA HONORS

Senior Dusty Jonas wrapped up his collegiate indoor career by winning an NCAA championship in the high jump, clearing 7-7 in Fayetteville, Ark., in mid-March. His jump also was the best in school history, breaking the previous record of 7-6 set by Jeff Loeschner in 1985.

Jonas became a four-time All-American in the process. Even if he hadn't won the event, "I would have been very happy he cleared 7-7," coach Gary Pepin said. "Dusty is now somewhere that only special people get to. He has a bright future, not only in the outdoor season but after his career at Nebraska. I'm just so pleased to see all his hard work pay off."



Dusty Jonas

Lukas Hulett and Husker women Epley Bullock and Sheryl Morgan also earned All-America honors during the two days of competition. Hulett finished seventh in the 400 meters, as did Morgan, while Bullock tied for seventh in the high jump.

WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS

Seniors Emily Parsons and Desire' Sniatynski and junior Tricia Woo qualified as individuals for the NCAA Women's Gymnastics Championships scheduled for April 24-26 at Athens, Ga. Parsons and Sniatynski were slated to compete as all-arounders, while Woo was to perform as a balance beam and floor specialist. They qualified in competition at the NCAA Southeast Regional at the University of Florida in mid-April. The Huskers finished third as a team.



Emily Parsons

As a result, Nebraska did not advance to the NCAA Championships as a team for the first time in nine seasons. Coach Dan Kendig's Huskers finished with a 13-9 dual record.

Two weeks earlier, Nebraska finished last in the Big 12 Championships at Norman, Okla. Parsons was second in the all-around competition and fourth on the balance beam. Sniatynski was fourth in the all-around and tied for third on the bars. And Woo was third in floor exercise.

RIFLE RESULTS

The Nebraska rifle team finished fourth at the NCAA Championships in West Point, N.Y., in mid-March, just two points behind third-place TCU. Three Huskers earned second-team All-America honors: senior Kirsten Weiss, smallbore; sophomore Amanda Jeffries, air rifle; and freshman Elisha LaFond, air rifle. Weiss, who is from Cornwell, Pa., also earned All-America recognition the previous two seasons. ■

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1 Intercepted pass in Spring Game
- 4 Wears No. 1
- 7 Bo's older brother
- 10 Opponent in 2008 opener
- 12 Winning team in Spring Game
- 13 Wears No. 98
- 14 Wears No. 99
- 16 Leading rusher in Spring Game
- 21 Wears No. 3 (offense)
- 22 Number of home games on 2008 schedule
- 23 First road opponent in 2008
- 25 Phillip Dillard's home state
- 26 I-back who moved to linebacker
- 27 Opponent in 2008 Big 12 opener

DOWN

- 2 Scored first TD in Spring Game
- 3 Football strength coach
- 5 Cornerback who missed spring
- 6 Radio play-by-play announcer
- 8 Kicked field goal in Spring Game
- 9 Wears No. 2
- 11 Linebackers coach
- 13 Defensive ends coach
- 14 Wears No. 3 (defense)
- 15 Defensive tackle who missed spring
- 17 Joe Ganz's home state
- 18 Leading tackler in Spring Game
- 19 Caught 77-yard TD pass in Spring Game
- 20 Offensive coordinator
- 24 Running backs coach
- 26 Threw 2 TD passes in Spring Game

Answers in June/July issue



HUSKERNUTZ



IDEAS?

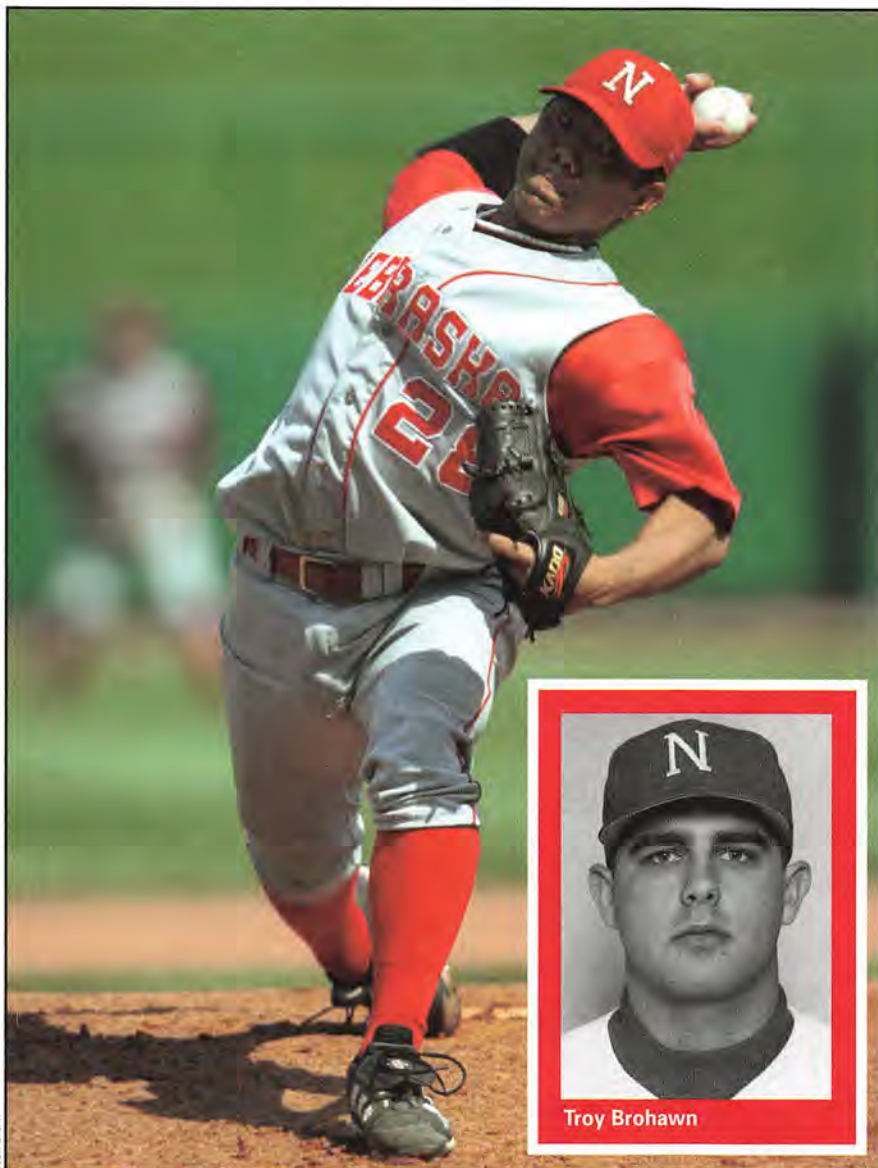
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Scott Bruhn

Troy Brohawn

(Johnny Dorn began his senior season with 31 career victories, 10 short of Komine's school record. Dorn ranked fourth in innings pitched (280.1) and starts (43) and tied for eighth in strikeouts (196.)

TROY BROHAWN [1992-94] NO. 13 6-1, 190 Woolford, Md.

The left-handed Brohawn had a remarkable sophomore season in 1993, earning first-team All-Big Eight honors as a first baseman as well as a pitcher in addition to being selected by Collegiate Baseball as a first-team All-America pitcher. He batted .329 with three home runs and 34 runs-batted-in and went 13-0 with a 3.16 earned-run average on the mound. His batting average was even better in games he pitched, .375. He struck out 123 in 111.1 innings, had nine complete games and one shutout. He didn't pitch as a freshman, beginning as the starting left-fielder then moving to first base, where he started the final 31 games. He batted .311 with two home runs and 22 runs batted. He was a pre-season All-American as a junior, but suffered a broken foot in the season-opening series against Oral Roberts and missed a month and a half. He played in 35 games, starting eight as a pitcher and went 4-4 with a 3.36 ERA. He was drafted by the San Francisco Giants following his junior season and traded to the Arizona Diamondbacks before making his major league debut April 14, 2001. He was 2-3 with a 4.93 ERA and one save that season and pitched one scoreless inning in relief in the sixth game of the World Series. He pitched in 11 games for the Giants in 2002 and 12 games for the Los Angeles Dodgers in 2003, all in relief. His major league career record was 4-4 with a 4.86 ERA. He is now the pitching coach for NCAA Division III Salisbury University in Salisbury, Md. ■

BROOK BERRINGER CITIZENSHIP TEAM

(Established in honor of former Cornhusker quarterback Brook Berringer, who died in the crash of a light plane in April of 1996. The team recognizes football players who volunteer in the community. The 11th annual team was announced prior to the Spring Game.)

Player, Pos. (Years on team)

Joe Ganz, QB (2008)
Aaron Gillaspie, FB (2008)
Cody Glenn, LB (2008)
Victory Haines, OL (2007, 2008)
Blake Lawrence, LB (2008)
T.J. O'Leary, LS (2008)
Todd Peterson, WR (2007, 2008)
Matt Senske, FB (2006, 2007, 2008)
Dan Titchener, P (2006, 2007, 2008)
Jake Wesch, PK/H (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008)
Tyler Wortman, LB (2008)

STRIKEOUTS, SINGLE SEASON

(With 66 strikeouts in 62.1 innings through the Kansas series the weekend of the Spring Game, Johnny Dorn could climb into Nebraska's top 10 in single-season strikeouts)

1. Shane Komine (2000)	159
2. Shane Komine (2001)	157
3. Joba Chamberlain (2005)	130
4. Troy Brohawn (1993)	123
5. Shane Komine (2002)	115
6. Aaron Marsden (2003)	113
7. Joba Chamberlain (2006)	102
8. Phil Harrison (1986)	98
9. Mike Zajeski (1992)	95
10. Bob Sebra (1981)	90

VICTORIES, SINGLE SEASON

(Only three pitchers in NU history have more than 10 victories in a single season.)

Shane Komine (2001)	14
Troy Brohawn (1993)	13
Johnny Dorn (2007)	12
Shane Komine (2000)	11
Johnny Dorn (2006)	10
Tony Watson (2006)	10
Joba Chamberlain (2005)	10
Quinton Robertson (2003)	10
Shane Komine (2002)	10
Dave Matranga (1990)	10
Pat Leinen (1988)	10
Phil Harrison (1984)	10

NEBRASKA NO-HITTERS

Anthony Kelley	5-0, 7 innings
vs. Oklahoma	April 5, 1981
*Cliff Faust	3-0, 7 innings
vs. Kansas	May 3, 1980
Tim Burke	21-0, 5 innings
vs. Austin College	March 15, 1978
*Richard Geier	1-0, 9 innings
vs. Kansas	April 20, 1954
Staff	15-0, 9 innings
vs. Peru State	March 6, 1993
Staff	25-0, 9 innings
vs. Missouri West	March 5, 1986
Staff	10-0, 5 innings
vs. Dana College	April 17, 1978

*Perfect games

Dark Cloud Has Lifted

One after another, current players say the passion for the game has returned



**Mike
BABCOCK**

THIS IMAGE MIGHT NOT WORK unless you're at least of a certain age. You need to have seen the classic motion picture "The Wizard of Oz," starring Judy Garland.

Dorothy and her friends awaken in a poppy field. They see the Emerald City in the distance. And they skip out of the poppies, off down the yellow brick road.

There is singing in the background. "You're out of the woods. You're out of the dark. You're out of the night. Step into the sun. Step into the light..."

That would be appropriate in expressing the change in atmosphere surrounding the Nebraska football program since Tom Osborne hired Bo Pelini to restore tradition.

A dark cloud over Memorial Stadium was lifted, allowing the sun to shine through. Former players are once again welcome. Coaches are cordial rather than condescending. And most importantly, passion for the game among current players has returned.

One after another, following the Spring Game, they spoke of passion.

Quarterback Joe Ganz: "That's one thing we kind of lost last year. Guys are passionate. They're full of fire, and it's exciting to see on my part because I've always played the game with passion. I wear my heart on my sleeve, and I give it everything I've got. The guys are passionate again about playing football and restoring order, getting this program back on top."

Defensive end Barry Turner: "When you're losing, you lose a lot of things. It's a new year, new coaching staff, new change. It's a new beginning. We're starting over. What you need with football, first of all, is passion. And that's what we've got."

Wide receiver Todd Peterson: "You can't play football without emotion. It's controlled rage. You can say it so many ways. It's something this staff has really tried to instill. I have to give them a lot of credit for that. They bring a lot of energy every day to practice."

Linebacker Tyler Wortman: "The passion's grown a lot. Everyone... you can tell everyone's having a lot of fun, flying around and doing really well."

The energy is tangible, the smiles genuine and much more commonplace. However, Pelini's team has yet to lose. There is no season's reality to temper optimism.

Those of us who have been around this program for a while — I've covered the Cornhuskers for 30 years — have come to understand the wisdom in the title of Osborne's autobiography (published in 1985), "More Than

Winning." It is about more than winning.

Of course, for some, there's an unfortunate qualification to that. It can be about more than winning only if you win. If you don't, some don't care what your philosophy is.

Had Jim Dickey written a book with that title while he was the football coach at Kansas State, no one would have read it. First win. Then write about more than winning.

Osborne won. And he got it right, did it the right way. Collegiate football should be about more than winning. Professional football is another matter, by definition.

Pelini will win, maybe immediately but certainly in time. He'll get it right, and do it the right way. He has not only Osborne's example but also access to the Hall of Fame coach.

And he has embraced that access, taken advantage of it.

The two are dissimilar in many ways. But both are intensely competitive, Pelini more public, less restrained. And both understand the need for teaching at the collegiate level.

Osborne understands X's and O's. He could still scheme with the best offensive minds, regardless of level. He understands that football is fundamentally physical, that the more you pound on an opponent the more likely you are to win. And he understands people.

His ability to deal with people, disparate personalities among coaches and support personnel as well as among players, set him apart as a coach — a collegiate coach.

At this point, Pelini seems to have a similar understanding, that he is coaching a game played by student-athletes, a game that, at some level at least, has to be fun.

"They're excited, obviously. This is what they live for," Peterson said of Pelini and his assistants, following the Spring Game. "And this is what we live for as well, as players, just getting out and playing football, having fun again. Today was a lot of fun."

After any practice in the spring, you could have found a player to say the same thing.

If you haven't seen "The Wizard of Oz," maybe you've seen the television commercial in which an environmentally astute young lady convinces a skeptical businessman that he can save his company a lot of money on energy costs. As he signs a document to accomplish that, cartoon birds swirl into the picture and the same song is heard in the background.

"You're out of the woods. You're out of the dark..." ■



Bo Pelini has embraced his access to Hall of Fame coach Tom Osborne.

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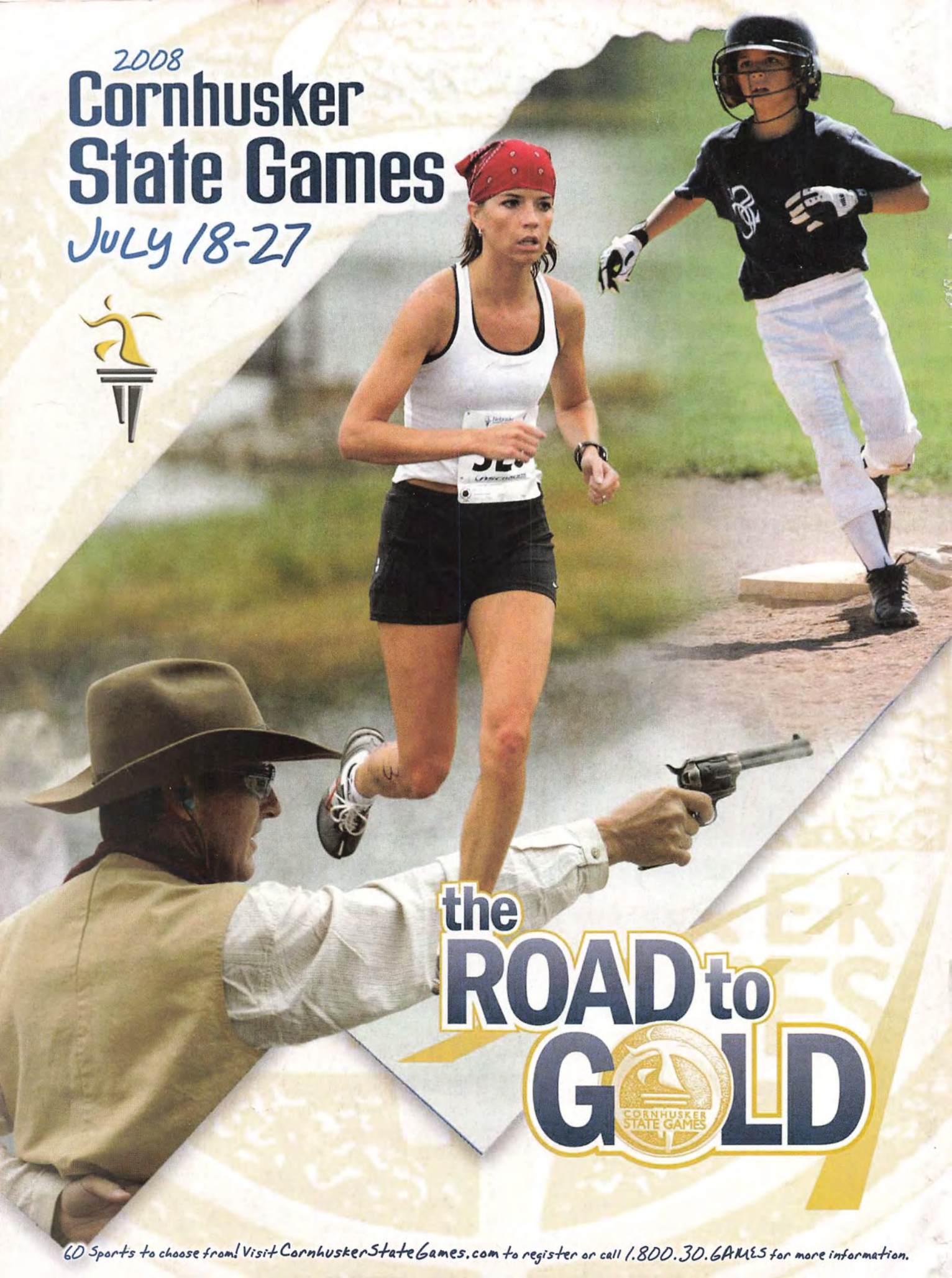
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